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UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY IN IRAQ FROM 1958 TO 1959:

COMMUNISTS, NASSER AND THE QASIM REGIME

by

ROBERT BRUCE BLANKE, B.A.

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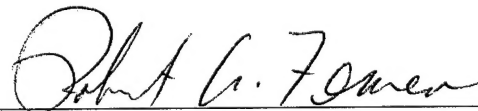
COMMUNISTS, NASSER AND THE QASIM REGIME

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Wm. Roger Louis

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Robert A. Fernea

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## INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the latter months of my first term and for several years thereafter, no region of the world received as much of my close attention and that of my colleagues as did the Middle East. There, against a background of new nations emerging from colonialism, in the face of constant thrusts of new Communist imperialism...the world faced a series of crises.<sup>1</sup>

President Eisenhower introduced his discussions on the Middle East in the second volume of his White House memoirs with that quote. And among the events dominating U.S. attention in the latter half of the 1950's would be the situation in Iraq following the 14 July 1958 coup d'etat. A pro-Western monarchy was removed from power, and the events in the year following its fall would give the United States pause, as what was considered a linchpin appeared to be slipping away from the West.

Prior to the events of July 1958, the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq was an unusual country by the standards of the Arab Middle East. The government was solidly pro-Western, consistently siding with the United States and Great Britain against other Arab nations, such as Gamel 'Abd al-Nasser's Egypt. Nuri al-Said, the leading figure in pre-revolution Iraqi politics, was alone among Arab leaders in his conviction that Soviet Communism represented the greatest threat to the

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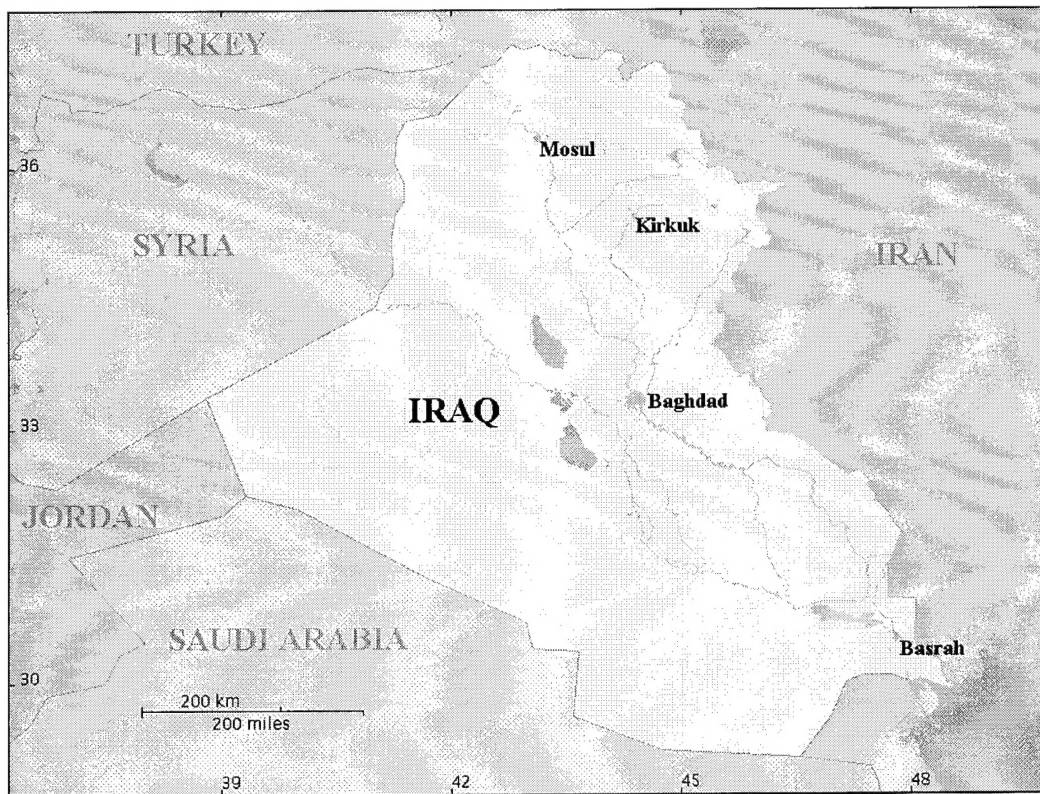
<sup>1</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, The White House Years, Waging Peace 1956-1961 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1965), 20.

Arab world. And while siding with other Arab nations during the Suez crisis and other issues involving Israel, the Iraqi government stood alone on other issues. Iraq was the only major Arab nation that welcomed the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, and it was also the only Arab participant in a Western-sponsored regional alliance, the Baghdad Pact.

This made Iraq an important part of Eisenhower administration foreign policy. In spite of this, the policy in place did not concern itself directly with Iraq. United States policy in dealing with the Middle East of the time was predicated on two factors. The first of these was the containment of Communism, the overriding theme of the Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles era. The Soviet Union was considered the major foe of the United States and the West at the time, and the prevention of the spread of Communism was of the utmost importance to the administration. Following that priority was the maintenance of stability in the Middle East as a whole. The region was important to America and its European Allies, and preventing instability in the region was considered vital to national interests. While this foreign policy framework dealt with the Middle East as a whole, it did not deal with internal considerations in specific areas in the region. As such, the United States government would be hampered when dealing with regional problems.

## MAP I

### IRAQ



This became apparent immediately after the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq. The United States government was slow to get a handle on the events within Iraq, and immediately began assigning gains to forces outside of Iraq--the Nasserite Arab nationalist movement or Soviet Communism--as opposed to the forces within Iraq that had been acting in opposition to the regime since the early part of the decade. The Iraqi Communist Party had been opposing the government before World War II, and the other major forces that would dominate the Iraqi political landscape, the Free Officer's movement and the Ba'th party, were created in the years following the creation of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli War. While there were similar groups outside of Iraq, these groups all had strong internal concerns. But most importantly, all existed in opposition to the Monarchy, and were not well prepared for dealing with events after they succeeded in bringing the Hashemite regime down.

The man who led the coup, Brigadier 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, would be central to the power struggles between the Ba'th and the Communists in Iraq. While the United States persisted in viewing the struggle as one between whether Iraq would be dominated by Communism and the Soviet Union or Nasser and the United Arab Republic, the Iraqi factions were dealing with internal concerns in this struggle. The issue was first whether Iraq would join with or remain

independent of the UAR, and then the nature of rule on the part of the Qasim regime. In the first phase of the struggle, the Communists proved useful to Qasim, as they helped him defeat his chief rival and keep Iraq out of the United Arab Republic, thereby firming his own grip on power. And afterwards he was able to consolidate power in his own hands.

But the State Department, and the United States government as a whole, were not able to come to terms with the conditions in Iraq. In their eyes, it was not Qasim who wielded power, but rather the Arab nationalists or the Communists. And this would hinder them in dealing with Iraq. They could not come to terms with the problems, and it was their own policy framework of anti-Communism and pro-stability that would create this problem.



## **I**

### **THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

The Eisenhower administration set foreign policy regarding the Middle East in the same context as with the rest of the world. The overriding concern was the containment of Communism. While other concerns also occupied the State Department, these were secondary to the containment of Communism. Individual countries were dealt with as they fit into this overall rubric. Iraq was looked upon by the U.S. as a possible ally in their struggle against Communism, and as a stable, pro-Western country in an area that largely seemed to be turning its back on the United States.

#### **A. Overall American Foreign Policy Objectives**

Under the Truman Doctrine, two objectives had been set for U.S. foreign policy in the Mediterranean and Middle East. The first of these was the containment of Soviet Communism. That containment was based on both political-military and ideological factors. The second objective was the

maintenance of general stability.<sup>2</sup> While John Foster Dulles, among others, had complained about the foreign policy of the Truman administration, he did little to change it with regard to the Middle East. Truman and Secretary of State Acheson were allowed to set the policy objectives, and the Eisenhower administration faithfully carried them over.<sup>3</sup> Both Dulles and Eisenhower were certainly in sympathy with these goals, as their opposition to Communism and Nasserite Arab nationalism indicated.

U.S. interests in the Middle East can be defined in terms of these goals. At the time, there were fewer specifically American interests in the Middle East. Most of them were of an international character, with support for the West and America's European allies figuring into the equation. The interests generally derive from the position of the Middle East with regard to the West, with even that specific term pointing to this fact. While the importance of some of the lines of communication through the Middle East were diminishing, they remained important to the West. Unimpeded passage through the Suez Canal and overflight rights were part of the U.S. interest in the region. Maintaining access to oil was also a vital interest of the U.S. While America did not depend on oil from the

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<sup>2</sup> John S. Badeau, The American Approach to the Arab World (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Goold-Adams, John Foster Dulles: A Reappraisal (New York: Apple-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1962), 200.

Middle East at the time, the European allies were heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil.<sup>4</sup>

Maintaining certain conditions in the Middle East also figured into U.S. interests. The first of these was that governments in the Middle East maintain their independence. An unfriendly government that was also unfriendly to the Soviet Union was preferable to a Communist-controlled country in the Middle East. The second condition that the U.S. looked to maintain was the overall stability in the region, in accordance with the second overall objective of the foreign policy. While social change was not resistible, the lack of stability that this change brought on could be more detrimental than the original situation, in that short-term destruction may outweigh long-term gains.<sup>5</sup>

### **B. Dulles, Eisenhower and the State Department**

John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State, was the leading figure in forming American policy in the 1950's. He was the descendent of two former Secretaries of State, and had spent the greater part of his life concerned with international affairs. He had been the principal foreign affairs advisor to Dewey in the 1948 election campaign, and had written the Republican Party foreign

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<sup>4</sup> Badeau, The American Approach, 20-22.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 24-25.

policy platform in 1952. When Eisenhower won the presidency, Dulles was his choice for Secretary of State. While he was not Eisenhower's first choice during the campaign,<sup>6</sup> Eisenhower himself wrote that

When I was elected to the Presidency that November, I promptly named him as Secretary of State-designate. Foster and I had met four years earlier, but I had known him before my election to the Presidency through reading his articles and speeches....From 1952 onward our relationship ripened into one of deep personal friendship and close collaboration in the work of conducting the foreign relations of the United States.<sup>7</sup>

This relationship ended up placing a great deal of the responsibility for developing foreign policy in the hands of Dulles.

Dulles was not unfamiliar with the State Department, and at the outset he tried to maintain a more detached manner in dealing with the Department. By the end of his first year, he became more intimately involved with the day-to-day workings of the Department. This was a result of his realization that the crisis or emergency of the moment dictates long-term policies, and can limit progress toward long-term goals.<sup>8</sup> He also was distrustful of the career staff at the State Department, viewing them as the product of twenty years of Democratic Party foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> The result, though, was that he tightly controlled the workings of

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<sup>6</sup> Goold-Adams, Dulles: A Reappraisal, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Eisenhower, Waging Peace, 362.

<sup>8</sup> Eleanor Lansing Dulles, American Foreign Policy in the Making (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Barry Rubin, Secrets of State: The State Department and the Struggle Over U.S. Foreign Policy (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1985), 76.

the Department. Additionally, he opposed introducing an additional foreign policy information center at the White House, attempting to make himself the sole source of advice during his tenure. Within the Department, he largely made policy on his own, and relied on his subordinates as executors of his policy. The result was a lack of coordination and a state of confusion within the Department.<sup>10</sup>

Dulles brought with him a set of beliefs, and they would shape the policies he and the President created and implemented. Philosophically, at least until the end of his career, he believed that the cold war was a zero-sum game, and that the situation was full of danger in the short run. He also saw power as the key to successful dealings with Communist nations, and that building unity on a foundation of fear was easier than basing unity on hope.<sup>11</sup> His primary concern in international affairs, though, was the expansion of the Soviet Union and Communism. While two ideologies, Communism and Nasserite Arab Nationalism, would come to dominate U.S. concerns in Iraq, Communism remained Dulles's primary concern. And the State Department itself would come to reflect that view as well. Although Secretary Dulles died in April of 1959, his mindset was still visible in the reports and analyses coming from Iraq.

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<sup>10</sup> Gulshan Dietl, The Dulles Era (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1986), 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, 13-15.

While President Eisenhower has been characterized as a passive figure in terms of foreign policy, review of the situation shows that this was an exaggeration. It is true that he left the formulation and implementation of foreign policy to Secretary Dulles; he on the other hand did approve Dulles's foreign policy initiatives. Dulles was loyal to the President in all of his actions. He did not fail to clear any policy actions through Eisenhower, and he also kept the President informed of every world event that he thought the President should be aware of.<sup>12</sup> The President was not, however, totally under the influence of Dulles with regard to foreign affairs. The Secretary's inflexible attitude toward the Soviet Union and others frustrated even Eisenhower at times, and he was able to be a moderating influence on Dulles.<sup>13</sup>

While Dulles was certainly the dominant actor in shaping U.S. foreign policy as a whole, other officials and State Department bureaus shaped policy specifically dealing with Iraq. The Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs was responsible for issues pertaining to Iraq at the time. The geographic bureaus of the State Department titularly are responsible for policy, but in the real world this depends more on the relationship the Assistant Secretary has with the higher echelons. The bureau would also be more influential on questions that

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<sup>12</sup> Goold-Adams, Dulles: A Reappraisal, 61.

<sup>13</sup> Rubin, Secrets of State, 77.

arose within the established policy framework, rather than actually creating and setting policy.<sup>14</sup> This was especially true in the Dulles era. The Assistant Secretary in charge of the bureau from July 1956 until July 1959 was William M. Rountree. He was a career civil servant, having started off in the Treasury and had come to the State Department afterwards. He had served either in the Middle East or with the Middle Eastern desks for most of his career, and had been the Counselor to the Embassy in Iran prior to assuming the post of Assistant Secretary. Almost all of his experience, though, was in dealing with Iran and Turkey, rather than the Arab States.<sup>15</sup> There was some criticism of Rountree to the effect that he did not rise through the ranks through competence so much as through the appearance of competence by avoiding error.<sup>16</sup> While that criticism may be overly harsh, it was unlikely that he offered policy initiatives divergent from those of the Secretary.

The Embassy in Iraq was the locus of U.S. foreign policy in that country, and also one of the primary sources of information to both the State Department and the intelligence community. The Ambassador in Iraq until December of 1958 was Waldemar Gallman. Dulles had dispatched him to Iraq in September 1954,

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<sup>14</sup> Burton M. Sapin, The Making of United States Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1966), 119.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of State, Biographic Register 1958 (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1958), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Wilbur Crane Eveland, Ropes of Sand: America's Failure in the Middle East (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980), 195.

and had given him the brief of developing a regional alliance network.<sup>17</sup> Gallman himself was a veteran of the foreign service, having served in a variety of capacities in both Washington and overseas during his career. Prior to being selected for the Ambassadorship in Iraq, Gallman had served as the Counselor to the Embassy in London. Unlike Rountree, who had experience in the Middle East, Gallman had no prior postings to the region, serving primarily in Europe.<sup>18</sup> This did not hinder him in his mission, though. He was able to develop a good working relationship with the Iraqi government prior to the July 1958 Revolution, and came to identify himself with the regime of Nuri al-Said. He considered Nuri al-Said a genuine Iraqi patriot, as well as Iraq's best hope for future prosperity.<sup>19</sup>

In December of 1958, Gallman was succeeded as Ambassador by John D. Jernegan. His background was closer to Rountree's than Gallman's, as he had considerable experience in dealing with the Middle East. Like Rountree and Gallman, he was a veteran of the Foreign Service. However, like Rountree, his experience was primarily with Turkey and Iran, as opposed to the Arab states, although he did serve as Consul General in Tunis. Prior to assuming the Ambassadorship in Baghdad, he had been the Counselor to the Embassy in

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<sup>17</sup> Townsend Hoopes, The Devil and John Foster Dulles (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 321.

<sup>18</sup> Dept. of State, Biographic Register 1958, 241.

<sup>19</sup> Waldemar Gallman, Iraq Under General Nuri: My Recollections of Nuri al-Said, 1954-1958 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), 220-31.



Rome.<sup>20</sup> Both Ambassadors had shortcomings in dealing with Revolutionary Iraq. Gallman was unable to cope with the fall of the al-Said government, which he had supported and identified with to a certain degree. And although Jernegan would prove to give more credence to events in the streets and the loud proclamations of the Iraqi Communist Party than necessary, he would also have a lot of company in that.

Another agency in the State Department, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, would contribute to Iraqi policy at the time, if only to provide information on events in country. Intelligence and Research is charged with preparing reports and studies for wider distribution through the Department. It also participates in the activities of the intelligence community as a whole.<sup>21</sup> The Bureau also coordinates the preparation of National Intelligence estimates with other agencies, with the Central Intelligence Agency assuming a leading role in their preparation.<sup>22</sup> The Wriston reforms of the mid-fifties brought about some personnel changes in Intelligence and Research, sending experienced intelligence specialists overseas and replacing them with Foreign Service officers whose expertise was more generalized.<sup>23</sup> While this was beneficial in the long run,

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of State, Biographic Register 1959 (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1959), 362.

<sup>21</sup> Sapin, United States Foreign Policy, 122.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, 306-07.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 127-29.

Intelligence and Research did experience some problems in the Dulles era as a result.

Hugh Cumming was appointed the Director of Intelligence and Research in October of 1957. Another career Foreign Service officer, he was like Gallman in that he had a great deal of experience in the European arena, but no real involvement in Middle Eastern issues prior to working in the Department's intelligence arm. His European experience was concentrated in the Scandinavian nations as well, with some work in a NATO posting, and also a tour as Counselor at the Embassy in Moscow.<sup>24</sup> While Cumming did in fact specifically address the Iraqi crisis in correspondence with the Secretary, it is likely that he at least coordinated with the specialist on the subject in his bureau.

### **C. The Threats to U.S. Interests and the Eisenhower Doctrine**

There is no doubt that both Eisenhower and Dulles viewed the possibility of Communist domination to be the greatest threat the United States faced in Iraq, or the Middle East as a whole. Eisenhower wrote that

...leaders of the Soviet Union, like the Czars before them, had their eyes on the Middle East. The Soviet goal was by no means merely to move ships through the Suez Canal....Neither was the goal Middle Eastern oil....The Soviet objective, was, in plain fact, power politics: to seize the

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<sup>24</sup> Dept. of State, Biographic Register 1958, 4.

oil, to cut the Canal and pipelines of the Middle East, and thus seriously to weaken Western civilization.<sup>25</sup>

They viewed the Soviet leadership as being dominated by Communist ideological goals as opposed to traditional Russian interests, and the Soviet outlook as implacably hostile to the West and inherently expansionist. They also felt that there could be little accommodation between the USSR and the Western powers. They also saw Communism as a monolithic international movement with the Communist parties of other nations serving as agents of the Soviet government. As a result, foreign policy was oriented in the direction of anti-Communism. In Third World nations, where anti-Western nationalism and neutralist attitudes prevailed, rallying other nations to the cause of anti-Communism proved to be difficult at best.<sup>26</sup>

This concern with Communism colored their view of some of the Arab political movements as well. The agendas of some Arab nationalist leaders and movements appeared indistinguishable from the overall program of Soviet domination, and these agendas were rarely viewed in terms of their local context.<sup>27</sup> As Dulles said in testimony to the Senate:

The determination of whether a country is dominated by international communism is a close question in some cases, and...is determined by a

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<sup>25</sup> Eisenhower, Waging Peace, 177-78.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Dowty, Middle East Crisis: U.S. Decision-making in 1958, 1970 and 1973, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) 25.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, 27-28.

whole complex of actions or lack of actions which the government takes in its international and domestic affairs.<sup>28</sup>

The inability to distinguish between the local agenda of an Arab government and a Soviet-Communist agenda would hinder U.S. government analysis of the situation in Iraq after the Revolution. They were predisposed to see a Communist influence in stances opposing the United States.

But international Communism was not the only threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East. Gamel 'Abd al-Nasser's rise to power in Egypt brought a competing ideology, that of a non-aligned Arab nationalism, to the Arab Middle East. Arab nationalism in and of itself was not considered to be a threat. The State Department had in fact been considering it as a possible foundation for building Middle Eastern defenses against Communist intrusion.<sup>29</sup> The West initially viewed the Nasser regime with hope, thinking that it might become a pro-Western, anti-Communist regime.<sup>30</sup> However, the Eisenhower administration developed the viewpoint that those hopes had been in vain. Following Nasser's 1955 purchase of Soviet military equipment and the Aswan Dam problem, they felt that

...Nasser was not only trying to improve his own position by working with the Kremlin, he was striving to get himself recognized in the Arab world as its political leader--the virtual head of an enormous Moslem

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Rubin, *Secrets of State*, 88.

<sup>30</sup> Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 23-24.

confederation which, he hoped, would unite behind him to achieve his further ambitions.<sup>31</sup>

Dulles did not trust in Nasser's neutralist stance as well, believing that "except under very exceptional circumstances, it is an immoral and shortsighted conception."<sup>32</sup> Nasser would prove to be an anti-Communist, as events in Syria and Egypt prior to the Iraqi revolution show. But a significant lack of trust in his aims and motives remained with Dulles and Eisenhower.

In 1957, the administration found the answer to some of its policy problems in the Eisenhower Doctrine. It had the single purpose of fighting Communism in the Middle East, but it also got America directly involved in the Middle East.<sup>33</sup> This was prompted by the revelation that Britain was militarily too weak to assume the military role that the United States had planned on it taking in the Middle East. It provided for economic cooperation with countries in the Middle East, military assistance should they request it, and an annual discretionary fund of \$200 million for economic and military aid in the Middle East. Congress passed the plan in March of 1957.<sup>34</sup> Reaction to the Eisenhower Doctrine in the Middle East was mixed. Iran and Turkey welcomed it, as did

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, 115-16.

<sup>32</sup> Rubin, *Secrets of State*, 77.

<sup>33</sup> Goold-Adams, *Dulles: A Reappraisal*, 239.

<sup>34</sup> William R. Polk, *The United States and the Arab World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 280-81.

Lebanon and Iraq. Other Arab nations were distinctly less enthusiastic, and Moscow sharply attacked the Doctrine.<sup>35</sup> In Iraq, while the government welcomed the Eisenhower Doctrine, it became more useful as a propaganda tool than it was to Nuri al-Said's government. The Iraqi Communist Party was able to use the Doctrine to protest against America shortly after its promulgation, stating that its main aim was to end Arab liberation movements under the cover of combating Communism.<sup>36</sup>

#### **D. The Role of Hashemite Iraq**

What, then, was the relevance of Iraq to the United States under a foreign policy that sought to contain Communism and promote some level of regional stability? The regime of Nuri al-Said became very important to American goals in the Middle East. Iraq was the only major Arab power that had endorsed the Eisenhower Doctrine. In joining the Baghdad Pact, they also were the only major Arab nation that had entered into a formal military alliance with the West. But Iraq was important to the United States on two levels. The first of these dealt

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<sup>35</sup> Goold-Adams, *Dulles: A Reappraisal*, 239.

<sup>36</sup> Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 757.

with the strategic position that Iraq occupied in the Middle East. The second dealt with the Hashemite Monarchy and the government of Nuri al-Said.

Eisenhower and Dulles saw Iraq as one of the Northern Tier powers that were important in defending the region against Russian attack.<sup>37</sup> As noted earlier, Dulles had dispatched Waldemar Gallman to Iraq for the purpose of creating a military alliance in the region. In 1955, the alliance that Dulles had sought was finally arrived at, as Iraq, the Northern Tier countries, and Great Britain entered into the Baghdad Pact. The United States, however, did not enter into the Pact. Dulles felt that it would undermine relations with the remaining Arab states if they did, and he compromised by naming Gallman as an “observer” to the Baghdad Pact.<sup>38</sup> But the fact remained that Iraq was the only Arab nation to commit itself to an alliance with the West, incurring the hostility of the Arab League and other Arab states. Eisenhower would go on to state that Iraq was in fact the country that the United States had been counting on to maintain the security and stability of the region.<sup>39</sup>

While Iraq’s location made the country an important member of the Baghdad Pact, the government of Iraq was of equal, if not greater, importance in

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<sup>37</sup> A military attack through Turkey and into Mosul, and then to the south, was seen as more feasible than an attack through Iran at the time. While it is logistically easier to attack the Arabian peninsula through Turkey and Iraq than it would be through Iran, it would still be an extremely difficult exercise.

<sup>38</sup> Hoopes, *The Devil and Dulles*, 322.

<sup>39</sup> Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 269.

U.S. eyes. The Hashemites and Nuri had made a commitment to the West. The U.S. government's assessment of Iraq was spelled out in a National Intelligence Estimate of June 1957. The Estimate's purpose was to assess prospects for stability and development in Iraq, and its role in Middle Eastern and Arab affairs over a few years. They saw the government as stable, and that it would likely remain so as long as Nuri al-Said remained active in politics. While they saw Iraq continuing to remain aligned with the West, they realized that they would not veer to far from other Arab positions as they did not wish to become isolated in the Arab world. They did, however, see Iraq maintaining ties with the West and remaining aloof of the Soviet Union and Communist Bloc. They also noted that Iraq's ties with Britain had been weakened in the wake of the Suez crisis. As a result, the strength of her ties with America had in fact increased. The general conclusion was that while Iraq would retain some contact with the Arab and Third World, as a whole Iraqi foreign policy would be the most favorable to the West of any Arab state.<sup>40</sup>

In short, the foreign policy of the United States regarding Iraq was dictated by concerns external to Iraq. Secretary Dulles and President Eisenhower established policy objectives and interests for the region, and specific countries

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<sup>40</sup>National Intelligence Estimate 36.2-57, "The Outlook for Iraq," 4 June 1957, Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957 Volume XII, Near East Region; Iran ; Iraq (Hereafter referred to as FRUS 1955-57), p 1048-58.



were viewed from this context. And the officials in the State Department were part of this process. Dulles expected the Department to implement his policies, as opposed to suggesting policy to him. As such, they were viewing the Middle East through the Dulles mindset. When the situation in Iraq changed dramatically, that mindset would still serve as their filter for evaluating events in Iraq.

## II

### THE OPPOSITION TO THE MONARCHY

There were a variety of opposition groups in Iraq prior to the 1958 Revolution. Older groups, such as the Istiqlal (Independence) Party and the National Democrats formed part of the patchwork opposition scene. The United States government would end up concerned with three opposition groups after the revolution, though. They were the Iraqi Communist Party, the Iraqi branch of the Ba'ath party, and the Free Officer movement within the military. All of these groups would play a major role in Iraqi internal politics and in exercising influence on United States foreign policy. But the level of influence these three groups wielded in the overall mix of groups and movements arrayed against the regime varied, and their ability to combine in opposition against the regime would also prove to be a critical factor following the overthrow of the Hashemites. Interestingly, ideology was a factor with only two of the three movements. While the Communists and the Ba'athists had an ideological base for their movement, the Free Officers were oriented solely toward opposition to the monarchy and Nuri al-Said.

### **A. The Free Officer Movement**

The Army, by virtue of its physical power, was always viewed as a potential danger to the regime, and Nuri al-Said was careful to take measures to ensure the loyalty of the Army. Army officers had plotted against the Hashemites before, and there had been a coup d'etat in 1936, and an attempt in 1941. Officers may have been contemplating opposition to the regime as early as 1949, when many of them were returning from the first war against Israel. They believed that higher authorities had issued instructions which prevented their full-scale participation in the war. The Egyptian Revolution of 1952 added further impetus to these officers.

A report from the British Embassy in Baghdad first drew attention to this possibility shortly after the 1952 Revolution in Cairo. A 21 August 1952 despatch to the Foreign Office highlighted two facts. The first was that one of the Iraqi political parties was drawing parallels between the internal situations that existed in Egypt under King Farouk and that presently existed in Iraq. That faction warned that similar events might occur in Iraq should the government not be changed to a more popular form.<sup>41</sup> But the embassy sounded a more ominous note in dealing with the Iraqi Army. The despatch noted that

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<sup>41</sup> FO 371/98737, Despatch from the Embassy in Baghdad to London, 21 August 1952, 1.

As for the Army, it cannot be denied that the general causes of discontent operate there with at least their normal force. The junior officers, who correspond in status and interest to the most disgruntled civilian classes, are inadequately paid and feel that the Government is indifferent to their welfare. Nevertheless, the Government profess themselves satisfied with the loyalty of...the army....<sup>42</sup>

While the government of Iraq may have been satisfied with the army's loyalty, a Western embassy had noted the possibility of disloyal groups within the Iraqi military.

While who actually was the first to form a Free Officer movement in Iraq is unknown, it was most likely Rif'at al-Hajj Sirri who was the first to carry out underground activities with the goal of overthrowing the regime. While al-Sirri was not highly competent, he did command the respect of his fellow officers. He was considered congenial, and had won a reputation for his patriotism, integrity, and straightforwardness. His group may have been organized as early as September 1952.<sup>43</sup> A second officer, Rajab 'Abd al-Majid, had met with al-Sirri two months after the coup in Egypt, and at that time the two had agreed to begin clandestine efforts against the regime. It is noteworthy that neither man was a line officer. Both were engineers, and they began looking for support among the technical units. Al-Sirri made it clear that al-Majid's cell should be independent

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<sup>42</sup> ibid, 5-6.

<sup>43</sup> Majid Khadduri, Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics Since the Revolution of 1958 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 25.

of, and unknown to, al-Sirri's. At this point al-Sirri began actively canvassing for support in the officer corps. Al-Majid, on the other hand, was slower to seek support and his cell grew at a slower pace.<sup>44</sup>

While the Free Officer movement was growing in the Iraqi military, the United States had examined the possibility of military coup in Iraq, among other things, in a December 1955 report from the Operations Coordinating Board. The Board took a detailed look at the internal situation in Iraq, and concluded that the military was loyal to the monarchy. The primary concern, though, was Communist infiltration into the military ranks as opposed to subversive officer groups existing within the military. They did not consider the Army a threat to internal security, but rather a force that was adequate to maintain it.<sup>45</sup>

Al-Sirri continued to enjoy recruiting success, but part of that success came at the expense of prudence. He was lax in exercising proper security, and people were able to gain access to his group without sufficient scrutiny. He was summoned to the Ministry of Defense in the summer of 1956, and was told that the existence of his group was known, and was shown proof of this. While al-Sirri protested and seemingly convinced Lieutenant General Rafiq 'Aref, he was subsequently transferred to the Kut province as recruiting officer. Before

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<sup>44</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 772-773.

<sup>45</sup> Operations Coordinating Board Report, "Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Iraq and Recommended Action," *FRUS 1955-57*, 982.

departing, al-Sirri confided to al-Majid that a member of the group had to have betrayed him, as there was evidence from a meeting attended by only four people, including al-Sirri. Who did betray him is unknown, however. While some of al-Sirri's cells were broken up, those organized by al-Majid survived. The tripartite invasion of Egypt in 1956 further strengthened the movement. By the end of 1956, the Free Officers formally organized, and a Supreme Committee was first formed. 'Abd al-Majid was able to get al-Sirri recognized as a member of the Supreme Committee. Al-Sirri was unable to work on it, though, due to the tight watch kept on him by the government.<sup>46</sup>

The Western governments continued to discount the possibility that the Iraqi Army was a potential source of disloyalty. Gallman stated in a March 1956 despatch that the Army remained loyal to Nuri.<sup>47</sup> In a July 1956 National Intelligence Estimate, the intelligence community examined the Iraqi Internal situation. They regarded Nuri al-Said as the central figure required for Iraq to maintain its unusual level of stability, and that there would be turmoil if he were to leave office for some reason.<sup>48</sup> They saw the Army as a potential player in a post-Nuri power struggle, but noted

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<sup>46</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 774-777.

<sup>47</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 28 March 1956, FRUS 1955-57, 995.

<sup>48</sup> National Intelligence Estimate 36.2-56, "The Outlook for Iraq's Stability and Foreign Policies," FRUS 1955-57, 998-1000.

There is no evidence of a revolutionary-minded military clique among Iraqi officers--such as that which overthrew King Farouk in Egypt--and Iraq's ruling family is in any case more popular than Farouk. However, such a group is likely to emerge--probably with Egyptian and Saudi encouragement--if the government's vigilance should be relaxed.<sup>49</sup>

While not discounting the future possibility of groups such as the Free Officers forming, the intelligence community did not have information that the Iraqi government was aware of. More importantly, a possible connection with Egypt was being established as part of an Iraqi military opposition.

Evaluations of the Iraqi Army continued into 1957. The Military Attaché at the British embassy in Baghdad, Brigadier N. F. B. Shaw, prepared a report on Iraqi military activity in 1956, and the embassy forwarded it to London in March of 1957. In the letter prefacing the report, Sir Michael Wright noted that the maintenance of internal stability was a major role of the Iraqi Army.<sup>50</sup> Brigadier Shaw noted that with the declining British influence among the Iraqi military, that the United States, Nasser, and the Iraqi Communist Party were moving to fill the void. His evaluation was that the Iraqi Army was free of the internal politics, and an important part of the internal security apparatus of the government. While he

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, 1001.

<sup>50</sup> FO 371/128067, Cover Letter for a Report on the Iraqi Armed Forces for the Year 1956, 16 March 1957, 2.

noted that the attack on Suez distressed some of the junior officers, the chief of staff was able to keep matters in hand.<sup>51</sup>

That year the U.S. intelligence community reiterated the theme that there was nothing to fear from the Iraqi Army. In a June 1957 National Intelligence Estimate, they came to many of the same conclusions of the estimate in the previous year. They noted that there was opposition to the regime among military officer, but that the Army as a whole did not interfere in politics.<sup>52</sup> they concluded that

Although pro-Nasser, pro-Communist, and anti-Nuri sentiments exist, especially among younger officers, dissident elements are not believed to be organized or politically capable of seizing the initiative against the present regime.<sup>53</sup>

The United States did not believe that military action against the Nuri regime was possible. This would complicate matters in July of 1958.

As July 1958 approached, the Free Officer movement had assumed several characteristics. The movement had no intention of aligning to one of the dominant ideologies. They were widespread as well--there were cells of the movement throughout the Iraqi Army. Their goal was straightforward--the overthrow of the Monarchy and Nuri al-Said. By this time, Qasim and thirteen

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<sup>51</sup> FO 371/128067, Report on the Iraqi Armed Forces for the Year 1956, 26 February 1957, 1-4.

<sup>52</sup> National Intelligence Estimate 36.2-57, "The Outlook for Iraq," FRUS 1955-57, 1048-1057.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*, 1057-58.



other officers represented the Central Organization of the movement. While they did plan to overthrow the monarchy by force, they had no specific plans for what form of government would follow. In fact, the only thing there was general agreement on was that the new government would be a republic.<sup>54</sup> Their views spread across a wide portion of the ideological spectrum. They were all from the lower or lower-middle class originally, and had no vested interest in the status quo. All but one of them had attended the Military Academy after 1934, and none before 1932. Noteworthy here is the fact that direct British supervision of the Military Academy had ended in 1932.<sup>55</sup>

The specific goals were set down in what they called the National Pact. Once they had rid Iraq of the monarchy, they would step aside and allow a civilian government to be installed, while others were more interested in participating in the new government. A civilian, known for his patriotism and integrity, would be selected by the Free Officers to be the head of the new government. The head of state would be replaced by a three-member Council of Sovereignty, and the Central Organization would re-form into a Revolutionary Council following a successful coup. As far as the question of Iraq joining the United Arab Republic was concerned, the Free Officers made no decision,

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<sup>54</sup> Khadduri, Republican Iraq, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 788. Interestingly, the lone officer in question was Abd al-Karim Qasim.

although they were all in favor of Arab unity to some extent. And on economic and agricultural issues, the Central Organization favored a conservative approach, as opposed to more progressive measures. They took more progressive attitudes concerning the social issues, adopting liberal measures concerning the improvement of public health and compulsory education. And their planned foreign policy was moderate. While repudiating the policy of the monarchy in aligning Iraq with the West, they did not take any decision to dissociate themselves from the Baghdad Pact or harm relations with Turkey or Iran. They expressed the desire for Iraq to adopt a neutralist policy and adhere to the principles embodied in the Pact of the Arab League and the UN Charter.<sup>56</sup> While the Free Officers were not pro-Western by any means, neither did they set themselves up to become a Soviet satellite.

Two of the Free Officers were to assume the leading roles in the July 1958 Coup and the power struggle following it--Abd al-Karim Qasim and Abd al-Salaam 'Arif. Abd al-Karim Qasim became the pre-eminent member of the Free Officers and the eventual leader of the coup movement. Qasim was born in Baghdad in 1914, the son of a carpenter.<sup>57</sup> He was able to get a government scholarship for a secondary education, and after completing it became a

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<sup>56</sup> Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*, 25-29.

<sup>57</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 778-779.

schoolteacher. When members of his social strata became eligible to attend the Military Academy in 1932 he did so, graduating as a Second Lieutenant in 1934, achieving the rank of Brigadier by 1955. He saw service in the 1941 war against Britain, and throughout the Iraqi action in Palestine. From 1956-57 he was stationed with his brigade in Mafraq, Jordan.<sup>58</sup> He attended the Iraqi Staff College from 1940 to 1941, and went to the Senior Officer's School in Devizes, England in 1950.<sup>59</sup> He had become the major participant in the Free Officer movement as early as 1955.<sup>60</sup> Personally he was described as jumpy, moody and unpredictable but capable of exercising a good deal of personal charm.<sup>61</sup> Upon first meeting him, U.S. ambassador Gallman

...found him affable and obviously anxious to get revolutionary regime off to as good a start as possible with US. Brigadier Qasim received me in friendly but somewhat diffident manner. He's quite fluent in English. We had our exchange without the benefit of an interpreter.<sup>62</sup>

And Nuri as-Said regarded him highly. He believed Qasim incapable of treachery, even though he had been given at least one warning of it.<sup>63</sup> Qasim was the commander of the 19th Infantry Brigade at Mansur at the time of the coup.

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<sup>58</sup> Uriel Dann, Iraq Under Qassem: A Political History, 1958-1963 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1969), 22.

<sup>59</sup> Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 778-779.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, 786.

<sup>61</sup> Dann, Iraq Under Qassem, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 15 July 1958, FRUS, 318-319.

<sup>63</sup> Dann, Iraq Under Qassem, 23.

Abd al-Salaam 'Arif was quite different from Qasim in many ways. He was born in 1921 in Baghdad, the son of a draper. He attended the military academy from 1938 through 1941, attending the Staff College later. At the time of the coup, he was commanding the 3rd Battalion of the 20th Infantry Brigade at Jalawla. The major difference between the two officers was personality. Where Qasim was cautious, 'Arif tended to be impetuous. He was a man of unquestioned courage but hasty judgment. His inclination was to urge hazardous undertakings, but he was never able to carry his colleagues with him. In a meeting in June of 1958, he stated that the movement had no leader but Qasim<sup>64</sup> -- a statement which he would come to regret. 'Arif was certainly as ambitious as Qasim, and may have believed that there was no specific doctrine that Qasim advocated. He also was something of a pan-Arabist, and more disposed towards those ideals than Qasim.<sup>65</sup>

### **B. The Iraqi Communist Party**

The Iraqi Communist Party was the opposition faction that commanded the greatest amount of the United States' attention. It was the Iraqi wing of the movement the Dulles and Eisenhower had set themselves in opposition to. But in

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<sup>64</sup> Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 798.

<sup>65</sup> Khadduri, Republican Iraq, 90-91.

1955, the Communist Party did not appear to pose that serious a threat. The Operations Coordinating Board Report stated that the Iraqi Communist Party did not represent an immediate danger to the regime, posing primarily the threat of infiltrating various professions and organizations. Even under more relaxed conditions, they saw large-scale Communist infiltration of key government positions as unlikely. They also identified the Kurdish population as a primary source of recruits for the Party. But the conclusion was that the security apparatus of Nuri's government could deal with the threat posed by the Communists at that time.<sup>66</sup>

But the middle of the decade was see a transformation in the Iraqi Communist Party. In the first part of the 1950's, the Communists pursued a policy of direct confrontation with the government in the streets, seeking the defeat of the Baghdad Pact. This approach came to nothing, and it resulted in the sacking of Hamid 'Uthman, the party chief. A majority of the members of the party's Central Committee revolted against him, bringing the party under their control. The new leadership also reversed the schismatic trend that the party had been suffering through, pursuing a fusion of the various factions that the Communist party had split into. Negotiations were started, and the actual settling

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<sup>66</sup> Operations Coordinating Board Report, "Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Iraq and Recommended Action," FRUS 1955-57, 979-982.

of doctrinal differences was relatively easy with 'Uthman out of the way. By the end of June, 1956, the Communist party had reintegrated<sup>67</sup> and become the most powerful single opposition faction in Iraq.

Two men were to rise to the fore of the party in the latter half of the decade. The first of these was Husain Ahmad al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Radi, who would be the secretary-general of the Party from 1955 until his death in 1963. He was an Arab Shi'i, born in 1924 in the city of Najaf, home of many prominent Communists. His father, although a sayyid<sup>68</sup>, worked as a clerk at a flour mill, and his family was always in poverty. He represented the party at the Second London Conference of the Communist Parties, but was "exiled" to the mid-Euphrates area in 1954 for his opposition to 'Uthman's policies. He was recalled to the leadership in 1955, and remained there until his death. The other individual moving to the front at the time was 'Amer 'Abdallah 'Umar al-'Amiri. Al-'Amiri was to become the ideological leader of the party at the time of the Revolution. He was born in 'Anah, the oldest town in Iraq, in 1924. His father was also a sayyid, a caller to prayer at a mosque in 'Anah. He became the highbrow of the party when his close associate al-Radi came to power, taking the ideological lead. After the revolution, he came to the forefront through both his force of personality

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<sup>67</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 709-711.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*, 712. A *sayyid* is one who claims kinship with the Prophet.

and resourcefulness. He was the Communist who had the greatest influence with 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, who was to become the head of state; this was a major factor in his rise to preeminence.<sup>69</sup>

The Communist threat in Iraq was evaluated again by the United States in 1956. The National Intelligence Estimate of July 1956 once again noted the government's repression of the Communist Party, as well as other political movements. While they noted again that if pressure were relaxed, the Communists would have the ability to create difficulties, they discounted them as a threat to the regime. They did note, however, that the Communists might seek to "create a national front of opposition parties" if given the opportunity<sup>70</sup>, clearly foreshadowing the establishment of that same National Front within a year.

While the leadership of the Communist party changed in the middle of the decade, that was not the most profound change that the party was to go through prior to the Revolution. The Kurds had been the ascendant ethnic faction among the Communists through 'Uthman's tenure as secretary-general, but with his ouster was to come the end of their power. The Iraqi Communist Party became an Arab Communist party in the latter half of the 1950's and began to view concepts like Arab nationalism in a more favored light. One of the primary catalysts was

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, 712-719.

<sup>70</sup> National Intelligence Estimate 36.2-56, "The Outlook for Iraq's Stability and Foreign Policies," FRUS 1955-57, 1002.

opposition to the Baghdad Pact--all groups were united in this. The new leadership was Arab, and they were dissatisfied with the attitude that the party had taken with regards to Arab struggles, considering it to be "negative" and "isolationist." At this time the Iraqis had no idea that Nasser was negotiating through Chou En-Lai with the Russians to purchase weapons. While the party was hostile to Nasser prior to the announcement of the sale, all traces of hostility disappear from their publications afterwards.<sup>71</sup> The stage was set for the integration of some Arab ideological bases in the Iraqi Communist Party.

The Communists began to work from a more Arab platform at this point. Instructions from the Central Committee in mid-November 1955 had the party waging its struggle under the slogan "For a National Arab Policy." After Nasser nationalized the Suez canal, the party identified with this "battle of Arabdom." At their Second Party Conference, held in September 1956, the Iraqi Communists adopted a position similar to the one adopted by their Syrian counterparts. They recognized the Arab National movement as progressive and democratic, and that Iraq was part of an Arab homeland. They also recognized that the Arabs formed a single nation, with linguistic, historical and cultural ties. This was in line with events in the Soviet Union, where the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union reappraised the role of national revolutionary

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<sup>71</sup> Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 749.



movements and the role of the "national bourgeoisie" in the newly liberated countries.<sup>72</sup> The end result was the domination of the Iraqi Communist Party by Sunni Muslim Arabs. While the proportion of Kurds and Shi'ites in the party dropped in the latter half of the decade, the Sunnis assumed a plurality in the party.<sup>73</sup>

The National Intelligence Estimate of 1957 provided another look at what the United States considered to be one of the primary threats to internal stability in Iraq. The conclusions were similar to those of 1956. As long as Nuri remained in power, the situation was likely to remain stable. The Communist Party itself had been demoralized by the repressive measures of the regime, and they would be unable to significantly threaten the regime.<sup>74</sup> Ambassador Gallman attributed the outbreaks of violence in November of 1956 in some part to the Communists, though he also credited the propaganda of other groups with responsibility for the revolts as well.<sup>75</sup> In summary, while the United States remained concerned with the activities of the Iraqi Communist Party, they did not consider them to be a significant threat to Nuri al-Said and the monarchy. But they did recognize their potential power should Nuri disappear from the scene.

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<sup>72</sup> *ibid*, 750-751.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, 995-998.

<sup>74</sup> National Intelligence Estimate 36.2-57, "The Outlook for Iraq," FRUS 1955-57, 1052.

<sup>75</sup> Gallman, Iraq Under General Nuri, 78.

### C. The Iraqi Ba'th Party

The Ba'th Party was the only one of the Iraqi opposition groups that did not receive significant attention from the West prior to the Revolution. This was primarily because of the small size and secretive nature of the group itself. While received little official notice from the U.S. government, Waldemar Gallman noted that Ba'thist propaganda had been responsible for inciting some of the November 1956 riots and disturbances in Iraq.<sup>76</sup> The movement that the Iraqi Ba'this came to lead, Arab nationalism, would occupy a great deal of Western concern. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden noted that Arab nationalism may be the chief danger facing Western interests in the Middle East, and that he considered Iraq to be the key to maintaining British interests.<sup>77</sup>

The Ba'th party was founded in Damascus in the 1940's. While the Communist party saw itself as an internationalist movement, the Ba'th doctrine was formulated by its founder, Michel 'Aflaq, as specifically and comprehensively Arab. This doctrine asserted that there was a single Arab nation, and that the tie between individual and the nation was the basis of political virtue. This tie could only be an Arab one if the individual was one whose language was Arabic and who believed himself to be part of a greater Arab nation.

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid*, 78.

<sup>77</sup> FO 371/121295, Note from the Prime Minister to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 29 July 1956.

While initially stressing the Islamic nature of an Arab nationalism, 'Aflaq saw the essence of Islam to be its 'revolutionary quality,' and eventually the Ba'this began putting greater stress on the need for social revolution. They also saw socialism as an essential part of the Arab nationalist equation. Their program called for the redistribution of wealth, nationalization of utilities and resources, limitation of land ownership, and other measures. They were, however, socialists rather than Communists. The Ba'th was to play a major role in the formation of the United Arab Republic, and would eventually hold the reins of power in both Syria and Iraq.<sup>78</sup>

The Ba'this gained their initial foothold in Iraq in 1949, in the wake of the formation of Israel and the Palestinian collapse. The organization started off at a very small level, totaling about fifty members in 1951. By 1955, however, there were a total of 289 Ba'thists in Iraq, excluding supporters.<sup>79</sup> In 1954, the party adopted new internal rules and reorganized. Previously, the Iraqi Ba'th had been considered a national command. The Iraqi Ba'th party became a region, with a regional command and a regional secretary. The regional commands were subordinate to the national command, and the national secretary was Michel 'Aflaq. This was in keeping with the Ba'thi doctrine and its pan-Arab precepts.

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<sup>78</sup> Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 357.

<sup>79</sup> Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 741-742.

Religious minorities were proportionally over-represented among the Ba'th, and their membership was youthful. It is also worth noting that there was proportionally greater lower-class representation among the Iraqi Ba'this than within the national command as a whole.<sup>80</sup> While they represented a regional as opposed to international movement, the Ba'this would come to be the primary supporters of the UAR in the days following the Revolution.

While not the first leader of the Iraqi Ba'th, Fuad al-Rikabi was the primary leader in the rise of the movement to national prominence. Al-Rikabi was an Arab Shi'ite born in Nasiriyyah in 1931. While his father was a low-level government official, his mother came from a middle-class family. While in his teens, he became interested in politics and began leaning toward the Istiqlal party. He had a change of heart after seeing the Communists in action, both in his hometown and after his admission to the College of Engineering in Baghdad in 1949. While not abandoning the Istiqlalis ideologically, he did note that the Communists were far superior tactically, organizationally, and in theoretical resources. He believed that the nationalist cause needed stimulation and new direction; and he found these things with the Ba'this, joining the Iraqi wing in 1950. A year later, he was in control of the Iraqi Ba'th, although how this

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid*, 743-748.

happened is unclear.<sup>81</sup> Under his leadership, the Iraqi Ba'th became one of the major players in the opposition to the Monarchy.

#### **D. The Formation of the National Front**

In the second half of the decade, these three factions were the most prepared to actively oppose the regime. None of them were either ready to or capable of overthrowing the regime prior to July 1958, though. This did not rule out action against the regime. While the Communists recognized that they would be unable to challenge the regime directly in Baghdad, they were more than prepared to carry out their program outside of the capital. Action was in fact taken against the regime, spurred on primarily by disaffection over the 1956 invasion of Egypt.<sup>82</sup> In November and December of 1956, Communists protests in Najaf and Hayy signaled the beginning of the unification of the opposition factions.

In late October of 1956, the Communist party was presented with a quandary. The attack on the Suez was the primary problem. It was combined with two other factors. The first of these were the intrigues of the governments of Iraq, the United States, and Britain against Syria, which were an attempt to isolate

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid*, 742.

<sup>82</sup> Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: KPI Limited, 1987), 44.

Egypt and pull Syria into the Baghdad Pact. The second was the ruthless suppression of crowds demonstrating in support of Egypt by the regime. While the Communists had believed that the conflict would be primarily nonviolent, the situation at the end of 1956 forced a switch to an insurrectionary policy. But the question was where to begin. Baghdad was out of the question, because the Communists did not have the power. Accordingly, they selected the towns of Najaf and Hayy, where they were strongest.<sup>83</sup>

On November first, protesters took to the streets of Najaf chanting anti-Western and anti-regime slogans. The demonstrations continued, and by the twenty-fourth they were at such a level that police felt pressed and threatened. Official accounts state that two were killed that day, but the total is likely higher. The police deserted the streets, and soldiers who were brought in began fraternizing with the protesters. The 'Ulama' in Najaf called for calm finally on the eighth of December, but it was another week before the protests died out. There were also strikes and demonstrations in support of the Najaf uprising in other cities, including Baghdad. Even before calm had returned to Najaf, unrest was apparent in the town of Hayy. The Communists there had been initiating strikes and demonstrations since the second of December, but they began to move towards armed insurrection. On the seventeenth, the town was gripped in revolt.

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<sup>83</sup> Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 751.

By the evening of the eighteenth, though, the police had returned order to Hayy. The Communists had learned a valuable lesson. They would be unable to strike a decisive blow against the regime outside of Baghdad.<sup>84</sup>

The Communists had demonstrated their power, though. As the United States had foreseen, they came forward after the uprisings and joined the other opposition factions in what became known as the Front of National Union. The new attitudes of the Communist party regarding the other factions, and the pragmatic considerations that came to light at the end of 1956, brought the civilian political factions together. While there had been planning for this type of confederation as early as 1955, it was definitely the chain of events ending in 1956 that gave the final impetus. The Communists considered the formation of a national front to be a necessity in September 1956, but other groups still had reservations. The regime accelerated the movement towards a united front, however, by declaring martial law and taking other authoritarian measures.<sup>85</sup>

At the end of February 1957, the Front of National Union was created. It had a five-point program calling for the removal of the al-Said government, withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact and bringing Iraqi policies in line with those of other liberated Arab states, combating imperialism and advocating positive

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid*, 752-57.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid*, 758-62

neutrality, granting democratic and constitutional freedoms, and the abolition of martial law and release of political prisoners. The Communist party printed the program of the Front and distributed it nationwide. The Front was governed by the Supreme National Committee, which had four members--one from each of the four parties. The Ba'ath representative was Fuad al-Rikabi.<sup>86</sup> While the Front was not to have great impact in the overthrow of the regime, it did represent the crystallization of the opposition against it. But even combined into the National Front, the factions relatively openly arrayed against the regime did not have the ability to bring it down. And the United States recognized this, continuously noting the repressive measures of the regime and the firm hand that Nuri ruled with. But their lack of preparedness for a military revolt would lead to harsh consequences in the summer of 1958.

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid*, 758-62.



### **III**

#### **THE REVOLUTION OF 14 JULY 1958**

In the summer of 1958, the State Department the intelligence agencies had an established view of the opposition in Iraq. They did not consider the Communists to be capable of overthrowing the monarchy, and the military was considered loyal to the regime. And while they knew the regime was unpopular, it was not seen to be in any danger. As a result, the July coup took them completely by surprise. A government they saw as both a bulwark of support for the West and a stable pro-Western regime fell in less than twelve hours of fighting. But the events of 14 July were not the result of haphazard action. It was the culmination of years of effort on the part of the Free Officers.

##### **A. The Coup of 14 July**

The Free Officers had been aware from the beginning that they would need to overthrow the Monarchy by force, and had been planning to conduct a coup. They had initially considered carrying off the coup on Army Day, the sixth of January, in 1958, but the Free Officer commander of the primary armored force

declined to go along with the committee.<sup>87</sup> They determined that two things would be required for a successful coup. The first of these was that it would have to be carried out using units that were under orders to march through Baghdad. The second was that these units would have to entrain at a time when all three of the principle figures of the regime--the King, Crown Prince 'Abd al-illah, and Nuri al-Said were present in Baghdad. Additionally, active duty units were not issued ammunition, in order to prevent just such a plan. The Free Officers managed to obtain ammunition by stealthy means and secured it for the eventual coup.

A fortuitous move on the part of the government gave the Free Officers their chance. The 20th Infantry Brigade, whose 3rd Battalion 'Arif commanded, was ordered to leave garrison at Jalawla, move through Baghdad and proceed to the border with Jordan, starting on the third of July. This date was eventually moved back to the evening of the 13th of July. On the third or fourth of July, a meeting was held at Qasim's house, at which all but one of the Supreme Committee of the Free Officers was in attendance. A knock at the door interrupted the meeting, and Qasim answered it. Upon his return he announced that Military Intelligence had apparently gotten wind of the meeting, and would

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<sup>87</sup> Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 797. It is noteworthy that this officer was Col Abd ar-Rahman 'Arif, the brother of eventual coup leader Abd as-Salam 'Arif and a future President of Iraq.

be making arrests shortly. The others dispersed, not realizing until after the coup that they had been duped. Qasim and 'Arif had set their plans down earlier, and were able to set them in motion.<sup>88</sup> The plans were entirely conceived by Iraqi officers within Iraq. While other agencies, notably the Iraqi Communist Party, had advance warning of the coup, there was no participation in it other than the designated Iraqi military units.<sup>89</sup> There is evidence that Nasser was in fact informed of the impending coup by Qasim, but Nasser informed him that it was unwise to disclose details of the coup to outsiders, and that Iraqis should be entirely responsible for the undertaking.<sup>90</sup>

On the evening of the 13th, the Twentieth Brigade entrained and set off for Baghdad. 'Arif contrived to send the brigade commander ahead to al-Fallujah, and then he and the commander of the first battalion, who was a co-conspirator, attempted to persuade the commander of the second battalion to take part. They failed to convince him, so the second battalion commander was arrested. At 4:30 AM the first units of the brigade rolled into Baghdad, taking over the Ministry of Defense, the Police Headquarters, and other potential sites of resistance. Shortly after 9:00 AM they captured the palace, and the King and Crown Prince were killed there. But 'Arif was on the radio at 6:30 AM, proclaiming the success of

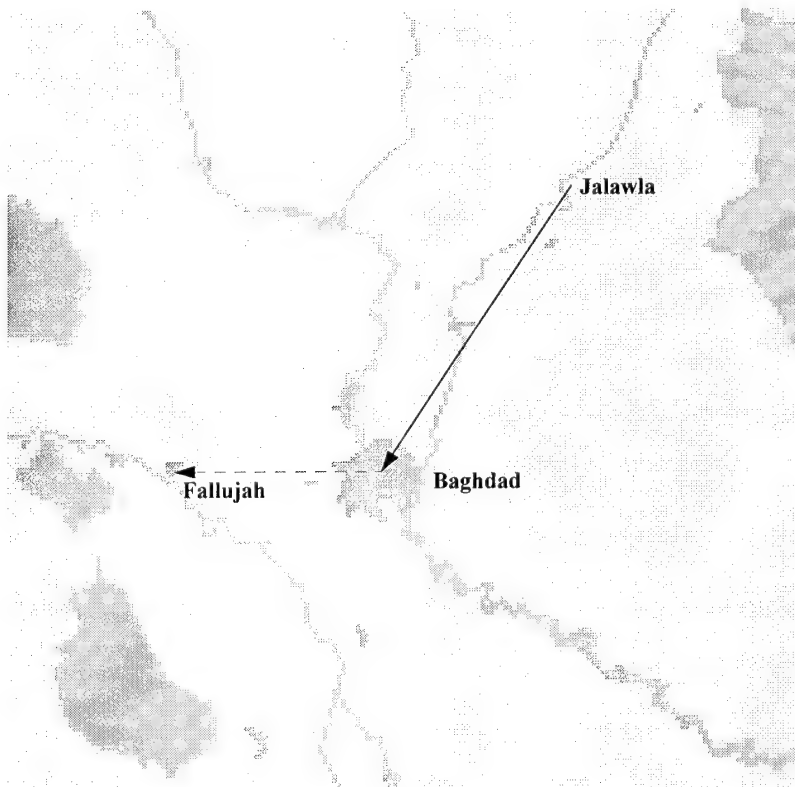
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<sup>88</sup> *ibid*, 799.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid*, 803.

<sup>90</sup> Dann, *Iraq Under Qassem*, 25-26.

**MAP II**  
**PLANNED ROUTE OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> INFANTRY BRIGADE**  
**14 JULY 1958**



the coup to the people of Iraq.<sup>91</sup> There was no armed resistance to the coup, and the Monarchy crumbled very quickly.

The plans of Qasim and 'Arif gradually took form in a series of proclamations heard on the Baghdad Radio Station. The most important of these was Proclamation Number One, in which Qasim and 'Arif's aims for the revolution were presented to the nation. Noteworthy in the address was the fact that Qasim and 'Arif declared the government to be a republic, specifically a people's republic. Additionally, they stressed Iraqi unity in the Proclamation, making it clear that the revolutionary regime was not a transitional stage prior to union with the UAR.<sup>92</sup> As previously stated, the government formed by Qasim consisted of both civilians and military, and they also covered a wide range of ideologies. Qasim held the portfolios of Prime and Defense Minister, with 'Arif as the Interior Minister. Another Free Officer, Naji Talib, was appointed Minister of Social Affairs. Two members of the National Democratic Party, Muhammad Hadid and Hudaiyab al-Hajj Humud, were appointed to Finance and Agriculture. The secretary-general of the Iraqi Ba'th party, Fuad al-Rikabi, was appointed to the Ministry of Development, and his counterpart in the Istiqlal (Independence) party, Siddiq Sanshal, became the Minister of Guidance.<sup>93</sup> Only one person of

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<sup>91</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 800-801.

<sup>92</sup> Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*, 47-48.

<sup>93</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 49-50.

Marxist leanings, Dr. Ibrahim Kubbah, was appointed to the cabinet. No members of the Iraqi Communist Party were included.<sup>94</sup> Reliable Free Officers were appointed to command the services.<sup>95</sup> Once again, while the persons taking charge of Iraq certainly had no great love for the Western Powers, the evidence indicates that neither the Soviet Union or the Nasserite movement were to immediately gain anything from the Iraqi Revolution.

#### **B. Preliminary Indications and Initial Reactions**

There is no evidence to date of an effective coordination between the opposition and the Army. Thus while the opposition is capable of causing disturbances, it lacks the immediate capacity to overthrow the government.<sup>96</sup>

This piece of information was part of a larger memorandum dated 3 July 1958. Sent from the Deputy Director for Plans of the CIA to the State Department's Director of Intelligence and Research, it offered a more detailed analysis of the situation in Iraq at the time, in relation to the situation in Lebanon. Precisely eleven days later, the Free Officers led by Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the Hashemite Monarchy in Iraq. This uprising delivered a rude

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<sup>94</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 812-813.

<sup>95</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 49-50.

<sup>96</sup> Memorandum from the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner) to the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming), July 3, 1958, Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960 Volume XII, Near East Region: Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula (Hereafter referred to as FRUS 1958-60), p 305.

shock to the United States government, which was already dealing with the crisis in Lebanon. President Eisenhower stated that "this was the country that we were counting on heavily as a bulwark of stability and progress in the region."<sup>97</sup> Allen Dulles, the Director of the CIA, said that the situation developing in Iraq was "the most dangerous in the world today."<sup>98</sup>

The perception within Washington and the embassies that were providing information to the U.S. government was that the events inside Iraq were driven by forces outside of Iraq, and that a Nasserite movement had come to power in Baghdad. The information in the hands of the CIA, the State Department and the press all indicated a Ba'thist/Nasserite movement against the pro-Western regime of Nuri al-Said. But the actual leanings of the government that came to power were anything but Nasserite, and none of the perceived threats to the United States was strongly represented in the government that assumed the reigns of power on the morning of the 14th of July. Additionally, it was the question of becoming a part of the United Arab Republic (UAR) that caused the rift between the two principle architects of the Coup--'Abd al-Karim Qasim and 'Abd al-Salaam 'Arif. Why, then, did the U.S. government immediately evaluate the

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<sup>97</sup> Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*, 56.

<sup>98</sup> Joe Stork, "The Soviet Union, the Great Powers and Iraq," *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*, eds. Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis, (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1991) 100.

movement in Baghdad as anti-Western and Nasserite? The answer lies in the fact that U.S. foreign policy with regard to Iraq was dominated by concerns involving the region as a whole, and the fact that the information used in preparing Iraqi policy was highly inaccurate. This inaccurate information prevented the U.S. government from realizing the weakness of the monarchy, the existence of the Free Officer movement, and the actual nature of the new government.

That the U.S. government assessment of the stability of the monarchy and the potential for its overthrow were optimistic prior to the coup is certainly an understatement. While the presence of communist, Ba'thist and Nasserite influences in Iraq was noted prior to the 14th of July, the Hashemites were certainly not viewed as being in imminent danger of collapse. A week after the establishment of the Hashemite Arab Union, the ambassador in Baghdad, Waldemar Gallman, cabled the State Department saying:

...popular dislike for present regime is sufficiently strong so that it is hard for it to do anything which will incur public approval rather than suspicion. We not inclined attach too much significance mild flurries which have so far occurred and which have involved principally students shouting slogans hostile to GOI and in support of Nasser...Union has not insofar as public response concerned affected government adversely though margin of reaction favorable to government cannot be thought of as very large.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 21 February 1958, FRUS 1958-60, 293.



This perception of events in Iraq continued to hold sway during the months prior to the coup. Another telegram from the embassy indicates:

A final comment on the position of the regime here: So far Iraqi army and police have shown no signs of disaffection and there is no well-organized political leadership among Iraqi's diverse and rather weak political opposition. While the Iraqis may be facing some difficult days as they undergo propaganda treatment similar to that administered to Jordan last fall, I believe Nuri and Crown Prince can be counted upon to keep their nerve.<sup>100</sup>

While the embassy in Baghdad was aware that the regime was not popular, it certainly did not foresee the monarchy falling within a few short months.

The memorandum of 3 July 1958 between the Deputy Director for Plans of the CIA and the Director of State's Intelligence and Research sheds further light on the U.S. government's knowledge of events in Iraq. The overall purpose of the report was to postulate Iraqi reaction to U.S. military intervention in Lebanon. They came to the conclusion that the Iraqis would not hinder American intervention. This was, of course, substantially correct--but not for the reasons stated in the report. The report under-emphasized the hatred with which the Iraqis generally viewed the regime, and generally accepted the fact that the regime would be able to keep the people of Iraq under control. And the U.S. estimation

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<sup>100</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 12 March 1958, FRUS 1958-60, 297.

of the loyalty of the Army would be proven completely incorrect in a scant eleven days.<sup>101</sup>

This sense of security crashed to Earth on Monday morning, 14 July 1958. John Foster Dulles telephoned the President at 8:29 AM Washington time to inform him of the coup. President Eisenhower's immediate reaction was that the U.S. had the whole Arab world against it now, because Jordan would be unable to remain pro-Western. Dulles agreed, stating that the problem had now become Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. He felt that the Arab world was destined to be lost, but that it was not desirable for it to be lost under conditions that would undermine the confidence of those other nations in the United States.<sup>102</sup> The U.S. Army attaché in Iraq sent a message summarizing the facts of the coup, and pointing out that the "Balance of ministerial posts include many Nasserites and leftists."<sup>103</sup> The coup in Iraq, combined with the situation in Lebanon, demanded the immediate attention of President Eisenhower. He called for a meeting of the National Security Council and began to formulate what was to become the U.S. response to events in Baghdad.

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<sup>101</sup> Memorandum from the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner) to the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming), 3 July 1958, FRUS 1958-60, 304-306.

<sup>102</sup> Memorandum of telephone conversation of 14 July 1958 between President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles by Bernau; Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, White House Telephone Conversations. Quoted in FRUS 1958-60, 307.

<sup>103</sup> Joint Air Force/Army/Navy message from U.S. Army Attaché in Iraq, 14 July 1958, Department of State, Central Files, quoted in FRUS 1958-60, 307.

The embassy in Baghdad was fulfilling its mission as well in reporting on the events transpiring throughout the 14th. A telegram from the embassy provided more evidence that the coup in Iraq was ideologically in line with Nasser and the UAR. It reported that there was considerable enthusiasm in Baghdad for the coup, and that it would probably prove equally popular throughout the country. They also informed the State Department that the "Character of coup is strongly anti-Western, pro-Nasser. (Crowds have been shouting pro-Nasser slogans and carrying Nasser's pictures.)."<sup>104</sup> The initial reports from Baghdad added credence to the worries of many in Washington that yet another Arab state had fallen under the sway of Nasser.

The initial interpretation of events was best summarized by Allen Dulles in the early afternoon of the fourteenth. As the Director of the CIA, he was able to access all available information. He made note of the fact that restrictions placed on the movement of embassy personnel hindered reporting out of Baghdad. His briefing evaluated not only the actual events in Iraq, but also their effect on other Middle Eastern countries. The coup was evaluated as a military movement supported by pro-Nasser civilian elements.<sup>105</sup> The coup and the new government were described as:

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<sup>104</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 14 July 1958, FRUS 1958-60, 314-315.

<sup>105</sup> Briefing Notes by Director of Central Intelligence Dulles, 14 July 1958, FRUS 1958-60, 308.

...pro-Nasir elements led by young army officers and backed by the mob. A "Republican" government of Iraq has been proclaimed with a cabinet largely of junior army officers and leftist civilians. Members of the so-called Baath party, which in the area has spearheaded the pro-Nasir cause, particularly in Syria, predominate in the civilian group. A Republic in the place of the King. One of these, General Rubai, has long been suspected of complicity with the Egyptians...<sup>106</sup>

The briefing went on to describe the situation in Baghdad, again discussing the crowds cheering Nasser and carrying his picture, and briefly discussing the disposition of Army units near the Palace and Nuri's residence. It also discussed the broadcasts hailing the coup on Radio Cairo and Radio Damascus.<sup>107</sup>

The effect on other countries that Dulles described appeared no less bleak. President Chamoun of Lebanon immediately requested military assistance from the U.S., Britain and France, and registered his surprise that Nasser had not first subsumed Lebanon, but rather had started by deposing the monarchy in Iraq and was now looking toward Jordan. He also briefed that Jordan's position as somewhat precarious, as the Iraqi coup shortly followed the discovery of an Egyptian-Syrian plot within the army against King Hussein. The Saudi King emphasized through an Ambassador that if the U.S. and Britain failed to act with regard to the events in Iraq, it would mean their downfall as powers in the Middle East. And Dulles briefed that some of the leaders of the coup were known to be

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<sup>106</sup> *ibid*, 308-309.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid*, 309.

pro-Egyptian. But he also briefed that there was no evidence, and in fact some doubt, as to whether the UAR had been directly involved in the Iraqi coup.<sup>108</sup>

Dulles's summary of the events was straightforward. He described them as the precursor to ending Western influence in the Arab world. His summation stated:

If the Iraq coup succeeds it seems almost inevitable that it will set up a chain reaction which will doom the pro-Western governments of Lebanon and Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and raise grave problems for Turkey and Iran.<sup>109</sup>

While not citing any direct Egyptian involvement, he certainly gave the impression that the Iraqi coup was an extension of the Nasserite movement.

A State Department memorandum of 16 July provided an assessment of the intelligence failures with regard to the coup in Iraq. They start off by admitting that

No significant indication of the impending action in Iraq appeared in any sources available to DRN, despite the fact that a very close watch was being kept for precisely this development. Interestingly enough, informal contacts with individuals who have just returned, having left Iraq only a few days or hours before the coup confirm the impression that there was no outward sign that the eruption was imminent.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *ibid*, 309-311.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid*, 311.

<sup>110</sup> Department of State File (Hereafter referenced by file number only) 787.00/7-1658, Memorandum from Harold W. Glidden of the Division of Research and Analysis for Near East, South Asia, and Africa to the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming), 16 July 1958.

They felt that there were several factors that contributed to this lack of data. The first of those was that while the Iraqi regime did not have popular support, that did not make it unusual in the Middle East, and that their efficient security services would have been able to crush organized non-military political resistance.<sup>111</sup> The memorandum also points out that

Circumstantial evidence now begins to appear that the lines of this plot were laid outside Iraq itself, among dissident expatriates in Cairo and Damascus. Movements of the more important expatriates were known routinely, but no particular significance was attached to them, since their following within Iraq was small, unorganized and under continuous government surveillance.<sup>112</sup>

They also felt that Qasim had been influenced by Syrian elements while stationed with his command in Jordan in 1956, and that the Iraqi Intelligence had not suspected him of wrongdoing, in spite of their extensive net within the army.<sup>113</sup> The State Department was able to identify some of their failings, but in the process solidified the United States' identification of the Iraqi coup as one influenced by outside forces.

The State Department persisted in identifying the Qasim government as one influenced by, if not directly controlled in, Cairo. The Department of

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<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*

Intelligence and Research gave its assessment of the Qasim government on the seventeenth. They stated that

The nature of the new Iraqi regime is probably not revealed in the figures now holding Cabinet posts and prominent positions. There is some evidence that several of the civilian employees did not know of their allotted roles until the military coup was complete.<sup>114</sup>

They assessed that the regime would develop along the Egyptian model, and that

...the true center of power has not yet revealed itself. The civilian members of the government, with two exceptions, are thus far largely silent partners and the officer members are the more vocal spokesmen. Qasim, himself, like Muhammad Najib in Egypt, may be a figurehead.<sup>115</sup>

They also were wary of the leanings of the Cabinet members, viewing four of them as having "long histories of marked leftist tendencies," evaluating one as "a close Party-line follower and steady fellow traveler" and another as "an active sympathizer and possibly a party member."<sup>116</sup> Their assessment of the future affirmed that:

This mixed assortment is unlikely to stay together long once the impetus of initial success wears off. In any case, it is likely that the Egyptian-directed hard core of the movement intends to jettison them once power is consolidated...It is likely to associate formally with the UAR at an early stage, and to profess a posture of nationalism, neutralism, and within this context, display a distinct willingness to establish diplomatic relations with the Bloc and accept aid from it.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> 787.00/7-1758, Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming) to the Secretary of State, 17 July 1958.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

Their analysis repeatedly gave the U.S. government the view that the new Iraqi regime would form a solid, if not monolithic, bond with the UAR.

The British government had many of the same views regarding the new regime in Iraq. On 14 July, the British embassy was sacked, and Sir Michael Wright, the Ambassador, used the U.S. embassy equipment to post his reports to London. In his early reports, he also noted the prevalence of portraits of Nasser in Baghdad. Wright was convinced of the pro-Nasser, Arab nationalist nature of the coup. He also associated the coup in Iraq with the events of 1952 in Egypt, seeing the same pattern in Iraq that had developed in the Naguib/Nasser coup. While his initial impressions of Qasim were favorable, he added further credence to the use of the Egyptian model as a pattern for the events in Iraq.<sup>118</sup>

### **C. Post-Coup Assessments and Recognition of the New Regime**

The State Department continued to evaluate the situation, and they also began making official contacts with the Qasim regime. The results of these were summarized in a memorandum of the twentieth of July stating that

...the new regime in Iraq (1) desires friendly relations with the West, (2) will maintain existing international agreements, (3) at least for the time

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<sup>118</sup> Wm. Roger Louis, "The British and the Origins of the Revolution," The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited, eds. Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis, (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1991), 56-57.



being will retain membership in the Baghdad Pact, (4) will not nationalize the production of oil, and (5) recognizes the UAR but is not joining.<sup>119</sup>

The support enjoyed by the new regime is described as being "far broader than that behind King Faisal." And they assessed the influence of Communists in the Qasim government as limited. The conclusion reached is that the new situation in Iraq may not work out in a way "entirely unfavorable" to the United States.<sup>120</sup> While there are still difficulties, the State Department was beginning to view the situation as less detrimental than the originally had.

A second memorandum of the same date discusses the options for intervention in Iraq, but dismisses them out of hand. The destruction of the Hashemite family in Iraq and the disappearance of supporters of the old regime indicated that there was little left of the monarchy that could be used to rally support for intervention. Under those circumstances, a military expedition to Iraq would find little indigenous support. And the Qasim regime's signing of a mutual defense pact with Syria and Egypt was seen to mean certain UAR participation against a pro-Royalist intervention. And Soviet or Communist Bloc action of a more concrete nature was considered likely in that event as well.<sup>121</sup> While the

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<sup>119</sup> 787.00/7-2058, Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming) to the Counselor (Reinhardt), 20 July 1958.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> 787.00/7-2058 (second file), Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming) to the Counselor (Reinhardt), 20 July 1958.

State Department explored the possibility of armed intervention, it was not viewed as practical.

A further evaluation of the regime, centering on the cabinet itself, was also published on the twentieth. Detailing the actual make-up and leanings of the Cabinet itself, it illustrated how Ministers occupied the entire political spectrum, representing

...from extreme-right xenophobes who were participants in a short-lived Nazi-sponsored anti-British coup in 1941, to far-leftists, including a few consistent fellow-travellers who were regular participants in Communist-sponsored neutralist conferences.<sup>122</sup>

The economic posts in the cabinet were described as being held by "the most left-inclined members," and they detailed the activities of the Minister of Education at length. It is also noted that many of the members were reform-minded, possibly pro-American figures who had grievances against the Hashemite regime.<sup>123</sup> It was also noted that the civilian members

...probably had no foreknowledge of the immediate lot, knew one another mainly as political rivals; they are not intimate and collaborated in opposition only during the period when governmental suppression gave them impetus to make common cause.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> 787.13/7-2058, "Composition and Leanings of Iraqi Revolutionary Cabinet," Letter from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming) to the Counselor (Reinhardt), 20 July 1958.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

Cumming alludes more directly to the creation of the National Front, as the analysis is both the right- and left-wing groups were infiltrated by the Iraqi Communist Party, and that the leaders of those factions now in office may not have been aware of this. They also assessed the National Front as having been "characterized by mutual distrust and many interruptions."<sup>125</sup> The conclusions were that the new government was tenuous at best, and that

The present ruling circle is almost certain to develop personal and ideological stresses and strains rather soon. The component parties had little in common beyond hatred of the old regime and broadly similar platforms of nationalism, Arab unity, neutrality, socialism...and more recently ardent pro-Nasserism....The immediate situation conveys the impression of an iceberg: much more seems to be below the surface than showing, and it is by no means certain that the real center of power has yet revealed himself.<sup>126</sup>

While the State Department was still looking at potential Communist and Nasserite influence in the Qasim government, it was certainly showing a somewhat better grasp of the internal political dynamic in Iraq.

While the continuing evaluation was that the current situation in Iraq was not the best to be hoped for, it was certainly better than the worst-case scenarios of Soviet or Nasserist domination. As the Qasim regime began to assume the reigns of day-to-day rule, pressure mounted for recognition of the regime in Iraq. A July twenty-third memorandum from William Rountree, the Assistant Secretary

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<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, to the Secretary of State, makes the point that

With the consolidation of the revolutionary regime within Iraq and the ruling out of any attempt to overturn it by force or otherwise, we seem to be faced with the question not of whether but of when and under what circumstances we should recognize the new government.<sup>127</sup>

The Assistant Secretary goes on to point out that the regime has restored order and gives the impression of denying Communist and Ba'athist influences, and that delaying recognition may cause farther difficulties. He recommended a "dignified but friendly stance, designed to lead to early but not precipitate de jure recognition."<sup>128</sup> His formal recommendation was

That you agree in principle to the extension of formal recognition to the Iraq Government if we can obtain agreement or acquiescence from the Muslim Pact members during the London meeting, and after Mr. Murphy has attempted to obtain the same from the Governments of Lebanon and Jordan.<sup>129</sup>

Secretary Dulles apparently heeded that advice. In a 30 July memorandum to the President, he recommended that the Government recognize the new Iraqi Government in short order. While stating that the coup had been brutal, he noted that the new regime had been able to establish control and faced no significant internal opposition. He also noted that the Iraqi officials wanted to maintain

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<sup>127</sup> Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs (Rountree) to Secretary of State Dulles, FRUS 1958-60, 331-32.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*, 332.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*, 333.

contact with the United States, and that he had consulted with the governments of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. Those three countries understood the advisability of recognizing the Qasim regime, and Lebanon and Jordan had expressed similar sentiments in private.<sup>130</sup>

Although the Qasim regime was recognized by the United States, an air of pessimism lingered. There was concern regarding the shape the regime would evolve into in the months following the assumption of power. And the two greatest fears of the United States, that either a pro-Nasser or pro-Communist government would come into being, were two of the most likely alternatives in the eyes of the State Department. And for the Free Officers, the work had just begun. In overthrowing the regime, they attained their goal. Now the opposition, which had only united by virtue of being in opposition, would have to govern.

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<sup>130</sup> FRUS 1958-60, 334.

#### IV

### THE ARAB NATIONALISTS AND COMMUNISTS FRACTURE

#### THE FREE OFFICER MOVEMENT

In August of 1958, after the initial shock of the revolution, the State Department started dealing with the new Iraqi government. As they had predicted shortly after the coup, the new government was not holding together. A power struggle was developing between the two principle architects of the coup--'Arif and Qasim. The struggle between the two was as much one for personal power as ideological. However, the United States saw the two forces most inimical to its interest contesting for control of Iraq. The fear was that the country would follow one of the two ideological movements that held sway in Iraq. If the Arab nationalists took control, Iraq would join the UAR and march with Nasser. If the Communists seized power, Iraq would become an agent of the Soviet Union in the Middle East.

The Qasim regime was facing difficulties that contributed to this dispute. The Free Officers formed solely to depose the old regime. Having done so, they faced the task of governing Iraq. While they had appointed a largely civilian government, with members of the Free Officer movement only having four of the

cabinet posts, their lack of a program opened the door for the Arab nationalist and Communist ideologies.

#### **A. The Nationalists Come to the Forefront**

The pro-union faction originated with Michel 'Aflaq's 24 July surprise visit to Baghdad. According to one source, Fuad al-Rikabi opposed the immediate forcing of the issue of union with the UAR, but 'Aflaq went around him to another member of the Iraqi Ba'th party, Sa'dun Hammadi, and they were committed to striving for immediate union. However, according to both al-Rikabi and Hammadi, the party membership as a whole spontaneously pressed the issue. Either way it was done, the Ba'th party had entered onto the field of battle, and they were ill-prepared to fight. They remained a numerically small party, smaller even at their height than the Communists.<sup>131</sup>

Their fortunes turned upward when 'Abd al-Salaam 'Arif assumed the leadership of their cause. He had already broached the subject of union with Nasser as early as 18 July, when the two met in Damascus.<sup>132</sup> At that time he may also have made the suggestion to Nasser that Qasim was the Naguib of the Iraqi revolution.<sup>133</sup> 'Arif was neither militarily distinguished or especially intelligent,

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<sup>131</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 815-16.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid*, 817.

<sup>133</sup> Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 159.

and had been described as naive and immature.<sup>134</sup> However, all indications are that he was not being manipulated by the pro-unionists. 'Arif was genuinely enthusiastic about both union with the UAR and the leadership of Nasser, despite the fact that his leader, Qasim, considered that view to be at best ill-advised. 'Arif apparently realized that in an Iraq unified with the UAR he would be subordinate to Nasser, but apparently considered that better than being subordinate to Qasim. He made speeches around Iraq where he advocated union with the UAR, and the constant suggestion that he might be the Nasser of Iraq, with Qasim serving in the role of Naguib, boosted his ambitions.<sup>135</sup> At this point, the Arab nationalist faction was irrevocably tied to the person of 'Abd al-Salaam 'Arif, which was to have unfortunate consequences for them.<sup>136</sup> But the slogan "unity now" became a popular one in Iraq. However, it is likely that 'Arif did not understand the full dimension of the challenge he was presenting. Vested interests that would be adversely affected by union with the UAR were bound to oppose him,<sup>137</sup> including the Iraqi Communist Party.

Qasim, unlike 'Arif, was leery of Nasser's motives and desired to maintain power himself rather than surrender authority to the Egyptian President. When

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<sup>134</sup> A. Abbas, "The Iraqi Armed Forces, Past and Present," Saddam's Iraq: Revolution or Reaction?, Committee Against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1989), 209.

<sup>135</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, Iraq Since 1958, 59.

<sup>136</sup> Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 833.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid*, 817.



looking for allies against the pro-union faction, he turned to the Iraqi Communist Party. While it is not known who first used the label "Sole Leader" with regard to Qasim, clearly the Communists seized upon it and popularized it.<sup>138</sup> The experience of the Syrian Communist Party colored the attitude of the Communists toward the UAR. While they had initially welcomed union with Egypt, it soon became clear that there was no place for the Communist Party in the UAR. As a result the attitude of the Iraqi Communist Party became nominally positive, but with a limiting proviso that made their attitude toward the UAR essentially negative.<sup>139</sup> Qasim encouraged the huge demonstrations in early August that the Communists sponsored, the theme being "federation" as opposed to "unity."<sup>140</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people took part in these demonstrations. And while the Communists could not claim credit for the entire turnout, they had mobilized the lion's share of the protesters. The direct leadership of the march was also in their hands. The turnout was enough to shake the Ba'thists and other nationalists badly,<sup>141</sup> and demonstrated that the pro-union faction did not have control of the streets.

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<sup>138</sup> *ibid*, 808.

<sup>139</sup> Dann, *Iraq Under Qassem*, 96.

<sup>140</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 59.

<sup>141</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 828.

In a meeting with the Minister of Guidance, Siddiq Shanshal, Ambassador Gallman received one of the earliest indications of 'Arif's ambition. While at the meeting, they continuously heard a crowd from Mosul in the background.<sup>142</sup> He reported that Shanshal was concerned about the economic effects of 'Arif's speechmaking throughout Iraq, stating:

...by words and bearing revealing that he was quite disturbed about visits to Baghdad going on now of groups from various cities where Col. Arif had been making speeches...these massive visits to Baghdad in first place take a good many men away from necessary work. Secondly, he feared that in this emotional atmosphere they will be promised, or go away thinking they have been promised, aids of various kind which cannot be delivered...he clearly had Arif in mind as the man making these promises.<sup>143</sup>

Shanshal told him as he left that he foresaw trouble in the future. While leaving, Gallman saw that 'Arif had come out onto the balcony to address the crowd. The crowd continuously interrupted 'Arif with loud cheering while he addressed them.<sup>144</sup> Gallman reported that although he had no doubts that Qasim was in control, 'Arif might be working to replace him by capitalizing on mob support. The ambassador had just witnessed 'Arif's ability to rally the crowd, and also

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<sup>142</sup> Gallman, Iraq Under General Nuri, 206.

<sup>143</sup> 787.00/8-658, Telegram from the Embassy in Baghdad to the State Department, 6 August 1958, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Gallman, Iraq Under General Nuri, 206.

noted that he was the only one of the four that was inclined to appeal to the crowds for support.<sup>145</sup>

The development of a split in the regime did not come as a surprise to the State Department. However, its appearance so soon after the assumption of power did. But the lines that it was developing on came as no surprise to them, as did the fact that both sides were anti-Western in nature. In a 22 August memorandum to the Secretary, Mr. Hugh Cumming of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research set the conflict as one between

...the National Democrats (primarily a radical nationalist group, but heavily Communist infiltrated) and the Communist Party of Iraq...ranged against a faction headed by Deputy Prime Minister Arif...who from the first has been closely aligned with Nasir and has sought Egyptian support for his personal position, is now openly pressing for full union with the UAR. The Communists and their allies...are advocating a federation or loose association short of actual union.<sup>146</sup>

While 'Arif was noted as being the head of the nationalist faction, Qasim was seen to be supporting the other side. The return of exiles from abroad appeared to reinforce the Communist Party, and Qasim protected them in return for their support against 'Arif and the nationalists. The public attitude, while not

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<sup>145</sup> 787.00/8-658, Telegram from the Embassy in Baghdad to the State Department, 6 August 1958, 1-2.

<sup>146</sup> 787.00/8-2258, Memorandum from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research to the Secretary of State, 22 August 1958, 1.

considered fully defined, was assessed to be increasingly supportive of union with the UAR due to pro-UAR propaganda.<sup>147</sup>

Equally important was their analysis of the role and position of Egyptian President Nasser at this stage. The State Department saw

Nasir's position in the contest of these developments is not clear. Since the Nasirite faction has held nearly all the key power-positions (Interior department, propaganda, control of the street organization) in the Iraqi regime from the start, he can hardly be seriously worried about a Communist takeover in Iraq.<sup>148</sup>

The evaluation continued, stating that it was "conceivable that he has allowed a full display of Communist-leftist strength in order to generate local pressure for union and to reconcile Western powers to its accomplishment, on the Syrian precedent."<sup>149</sup> There was concern that the speed of events overcame even Nasser, but the bottom line was that the pro-union faction could easily become an irresistible force.<sup>150</sup>

### **B. 'Arif's Fall from Grace**

The beginning of 'Arif's fall from power began in mid-September. The Embassy reported that 'Arif had been relieved as Deputy Commander-in-Chief of

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<sup>147</sup> *ibid*, 1.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid*, 1-2.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid*, 2.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid*, 2.

Iraqi armed forces by a Republican decree of 11 September. While forfeiting his position in the military, he retained his cabinet portfolios of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior.<sup>151</sup> Ambassador Gallman stated:

It is not yet clear whether this move represents a demotion for Arif or whether he relieved at own request in order concentrate on more pressing and important civilian duties...action indicative first official crack in what has been united front. If this is the case, on the basis of our estimates of the new regime thus far, we will be lucky if Arif is on the skids rather than Qasim.<sup>152</sup>

While reporting information indicating a lowering of 'Arif's status, Gallman continues to report that the nationalist faction appears stronger than the Communist one.

'Arif continued to lose power in Baghdad. On 30 September, Qasim stripped him of his cabinet posts as well.<sup>153</sup> Qasim appointed 'Arif Ambassador to West Germany, and at that point 'Arif sent a letter of resignation to Qasim, stating that he preferred to remain home without a post than to serve overseas. On 11 October, Qasim invited 'Arif and two others to his house, in order to convince 'Arif to accept the post in Bonn. Qasim said that his departure was required, as his presence was causing dissension. He also promised to recall him in three weeks. 'Arif continued to refuse, and at one point may have either tried to kill

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<sup>151</sup> 787.00/9-1358, Telegram from the Embassy in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, 13 September 1958, 1.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>153</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 831.

Qasim or commit suicide. But in the end 'Arif accepted the post, and departed for Europe the next day.<sup>154</sup>

The immediate internal situation in Iraq was much clearer to American policy makers after 'Arif's dismissal. On 3 October, Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles stated at a National Security Council meeting that

In Baghdad Prime Minister Qasim has strengthened his own position by depriving former Deputy Prime Minister Arif of all his cabinet prerogatives and banishing him to West Germany as Ambassador of Iraq to Bonn. However, in all probability...we have not heard the last of Arif. Meanwhile Prime Minister Qasim did not favor a union of Iraq and UAR and his government seemed to be trying to move into a more independent foreign policy.<sup>155</sup>

Discussions in New York between William M. Rountree, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs and the Foreign Minister and Permanent United Nations representative of Iraq clarified the situation to a greater degree. Rountree stated that while both the United States and the Soviet Union had the goal of preventing union between Iraq and the UAR, the United States would not interfere if the Iraqis and UAR wished to unite. The Foreign Minister assured Rountree that the Iraqi government wished to maintain good relations with the United States, and that "Iraq did not desire union. It wished to have

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<sup>154</sup> Khadduri, Republican Iraq, 95-96.

<sup>155</sup> Memorandum from S. Everett Gleason, Deputy Executive Secretary of the National Security Council, 3 October 1958, FRUS 1958-1960, 341.

close relations with the United Arab Republic and to achieve these in the framework of the Arab League.”<sup>156</sup>

After ‘Arif’s removal and exile, the power structure of the Iraqi government began to shift. The Embassy offered an analysis of the situation in Baghdad on the three-month anniversary of the coup. While attempting to provide some forecast of events, Gallman noted that it would be hazardous at best.

Attacks on the U.S. through press and radio continued, with the U.S. consistently labeled as “imperialistic,” with the “terminology of these attacks ...increasingly ‘Made-in-Moscow.’”<sup>157</sup> They assessed the state of government as virtually nonexistent in the traditional sense, with individual ministers issuing regulations on occasion. They also noted the government’s lack of men experienced in governing, especially in the field of economic development.<sup>158</sup> And they also examined the splits developing in the government. The Embassy stated that

Momentarily Qassim is on top. Arif, is second in July 14 plot, has been deprived of military and political power-positions and left October 12 to become Iraqi Ambassador in Bonn. The known Baathist members of the cabinet were removed or demoted at the same time Arif fell from grace. Thus most important elements working toward union with UAR, or at the

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<sup>156</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, 11 October 1958, 1-2.

<sup>157</sup> 787.00/10-1458, Telegram from the Embassy in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, 14 October 1958, 1.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid*, 2.

least toward very close collaboration with Nasser, has been removed from center of government.<sup>159</sup>

While noting that the Arab nationalists had suffered a setback, they saw the National Democrats as having the most influence over Qasim at that time.<sup>160</sup> The State Department believed that the Communists had heavily infiltrated the National Democrats,<sup>161</sup> and that they were naive regarding the Communist threat to Iraq. Qasim himself was seen as a sincere anti-Communist, who might be trying to hold them in check. While not playing a direct role in the removal of 'Arif and the nationalists, the Communists gained maneuvering room at the time. Finally, the State Department saw the regime as unstable, with pressure from both inside and out, and that removing the framework of the old regime had occupied the Qasim regime more than installing their own.<sup>162</sup> In short, the regime was still trying to establish itself, and its origin as a congress of the various opposition groups was beginning to make itself felt.

However, Allen Dulles's words that they had not seen the last of 'Arif proved prophetic indeed. 'Arif returned to Baghdad without authorization on 4 November.<sup>163</sup> The next day he went to see Qasim, stating that he had returned in

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<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, 14 October 1958, 3.

<sup>161</sup> 787.00/8-2258, Memorandum from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research to the Secretary of State, 22 August 1958, 1.

<sup>162</sup> 787.00/10-1458, Telegram from the Embassy in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, 14 October 1958, 3-4.

<sup>163</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 831.



accordance with Qasim's promise. Qasim explained to 'Arif that the conditions which had required his departure still existed, and that he could not remain in Iraq. He would be appointed to the ambassadorship of the country of his choice, however. 'Arif declined, saying that he preferred to remain in Iraq in any post, even as a soldier. On 6 November, 'Arif was arrested and imprisoned to await trial.<sup>164</sup>

'Arif's return muddled the situation once again, giving the nationalists a figure to rally around. Mr. Hugh Cumming of Intelligence and Research prepared another note for Secretary Dulles, outlining the impact of his return and subsequent arrest. The event "not only precipitated the showdown stage in the power struggle within Iraq itself but has also created an open challenge to...Nasir."<sup>165</sup> Owing to the speed of the action, there was no immediate public response to 'Arif's arrest noted in Iraq or the UAR. The Qasim regime tried to maintain the propaganda initiative, broadcasting slogans against imperialist conspiracies and possibly laying the groundwork for charges against 'Arif. They considered Nasser's reaction to be the most important factor, however. As 'Arif had been his chief supporter in Iraq, the arrest was a direct and public slap at him. And the arrest of 'Arif could force Nasser into a quandary from a propaganda

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<sup>164</sup> Khadduri, Republican Iraq, 97.

<sup>165</sup> Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming) to Secretary of State Dulles, 5 November 1958, FRUS 1958-60, 351.

point of view as well. He would be hard placed to criticize the new regime so soon after extolling it. Finally, while they could not assess the potential gains of the Communists, it seemed likely that they would profit.<sup>166</sup>

### **C. The Communists Step to the Front**

With the fortunes of the nationalist faction waning, the State Department paid greater attention to the Iraqi Communist Party. Intelligence and Research specifically addressed the Communist threat to the regime in a note directed to the Secretary of State on 25 November. The present situation was viewed as an outgrowth of the revolution, in that the only unifying factor had been opposition to the monarchy. The issue of relations with the UAR and how closely Iraq should be tied to Nasser caused the split. Qasim was assessed to be relying on the head of the National Democratic Party, with both of them viewed as being politically naive regarding the Communists. Qasim's non-Communist supporters were urging him to dissociate himself from the Party.<sup>167</sup> As for the Iraqi Communist Party, they

...have succeeded in establishing themselves in very strong positions in government and, among other things, are in control of the propaganda apparatus. While Communist infiltration probably has not yet got out of

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<sup>166</sup> *ibid*, 351-52.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid*, 353-54.

control, the point of no return may be reached in a few months should the Qasim regime continue on its present course.<sup>168</sup>

Additionally, they correctly assessed Rashid 'Ali al-Gaylani as being the most likely center of any UAR-backed plot against the Qasim regime. And should Qasim have to maintain his power against a coup attempt with Communist help, his debt to them would increase and they viewed his chances of being able to step out from under their influence as dim.<sup>169</sup>

On 4 December, Intelligence and Research re-evaluated the situation. In the overall picture, little had changed. Qasim was reported to have discovered the Rashid 'Ali plot against him, and was "spending an inordinate share of his time devising personal security measures and shifting officer assignments."<sup>170</sup> The regime as a whole was not providing any kind of leadership for the country, rumors were reported of a potential coup. The effect of this was to preoccupy Qasim with countering Ba'th actions. In the process, he was ignoring high- and low-level Communist infiltration in the government. While believing that Qasim had a sincere desire to crack down on the Communist Party of Iraq, he was prevented from doing so until he reduced the threat from the Ba'th party and the major share of arms contracted from the Soviet Bloc had arrived in Iraq. And

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<sup>168</sup> *ibid*, 354.

<sup>169</sup> *ibid*, 354.

<sup>170</sup> 787.00/12-458, Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming) to Secretary of State Dulles, 4 December 1958, 1.

finally, his observers viewed his decision on whether or not to execute members of the former regime as a test of how obligated he felt to the Soviet Union and the Iraqi Party.<sup>171</sup>

The State Department was correct in assessing Rashid 'Ali as the most likely leader of a nationalist coup plot against Qasim, and he had in fact been planning one. Whether piqued at not being offered a government post, or out of a genuine conviction that Qasim was wrong, he had set about planning Qasim's overthrow. The plan was to raise rebellion in the middle Euphrates, and was unrealistic at the time. The amateurish nature of the conspirators compounded this problem.<sup>172</sup> Word reached Qasim that a potential rebellion was set for 9 December in the middle Euphrates, and Military Intelligence infiltrated the conspirators. The Qasim regime arrested Rashid 'Ali and his co-conspirators shortly before the target date.<sup>173</sup> Of greater import was the fact that Rashid 'Ali had made contact with several officers before his arrest, including Ri'fat Hajj al-Sirri, the founder of the Free Officer movement, and that they were aware of his plans. These officers would form the nucleus of the March 1959 Mosul uprising.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> *ibid*, 1-2.

<sup>172</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 61-62.

<sup>173</sup> Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*, 102.

<sup>174</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 61-62.

By this time the Arab nationalists were no longer the dominant ideological force in Iraq. The Iraqi Communist Party had become the most powerful single faction in the country. They had concluded in September that the July revolution was not the proletarian revolution, but rather produced a nationalist, bourgeois regime in which the various levels of the bourgeoisie were represented. They recognized that they had common cause with Qasim in their opposition to the pan-Arab faction, and felt that Qasim would be constrained to allow them to mobilize popular support for his regime.<sup>175</sup> Shortly after the revolution, the Communists organized a popular militia, known as the People's Resistance<sup>176</sup> or the Popular Resistance Force.<sup>177</sup> The force grew quickly, having some 11,000 volunteers at its disposal in mid-August of 1958. Qasim never allowed the force to grow into a militia that could compete with the military, as a close check was kept on its weapons. However, it was informally linked to the regime and provided it with a support base at the ground level.<sup>178</sup>

Other parts of the Communist Party were experiencing greatly increased membership as well. It had become a power to reckon with, inasmuch as it could exercise control over the streets of Baghdad. Their popularity had risen to such a

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<sup>175</sup> Khadduri, Republican Iraq, 120.

<sup>176</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, Iraq Since 1958, 62-63.

<sup>177</sup> Dann, Iraq Under Qassem, 104.

<sup>178</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, Iraq Since 1958, 63.

level that the Party was forced to announce in mid-January 1959 that it was unable to accept new members. Front organizations of the Party were also very popular, and the party was gaining control of the executive committees of student, professional, and labor organizations.<sup>179</sup> At the end of 1958, the Iraqi Communist Party was approaching the zenith of its power, and had firmly cemented its hold on U.S. policy makers.

By the end of December, the National Security Council was trying to formulate new policy regarding Iraq. A briefing paper for the NSC concerning U.S. policy laid out the problem bluntly:

...the Kassem regime in Iraq may be (1) in danger of falling under early Communist domination or (2) that an effort may be made to take over control through possible action by Army elements having a possible pro-UAR orientation. Either development would have serious implications for U.S. policy toward Iraq and toward the Near East generally...<sup>180</sup>

Communist success in Iraq would obviate the U.S. government primary objective of denying Soviet domination of the area. Additionally, it threatened the two secondary objectives of promoting stable, popular governments that would resist Communism and countering Communist resistance and subversion. The paper also detailed potential policy questions, including the possibility of an agreement regarding Iraq with Nasser, the identification of any force in Iraqi politics that was

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<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, 63.

<sup>180</sup> Draft Briefing Paper Prepared for the National Security Council, 19 December 1958, FRUS 1958-60, 366.

both anti-UAR and anti-Communist, and the possibility that Qasim might turn on the Communists as he turned on the Ba'thists and Arab nationalists.<sup>181</sup>

William Rountree essentially reinforced this view prior to the NSC meeting. He noted that Qasim was either a Communist dupe, or that he will be unable to maintain power should he turn out the Communists. Rountree viewed the emergence of a pro-UAR regime as the most likely result of a coup, and that Nasser would use any kind of increased tie to Iraq to influence the Gulf states.<sup>182</sup> But he cautioned that

Against this likelihood must be weighed the longer-range implications of the possibility of the achievement by political subversion of the long-cherished Soviet goal of domination of the Persian Gulf area if Communist influence in Iraq is not arrested.<sup>183</sup>

The framework for the policy was simply set: preventing the domination of Iraq by Communists was the most pressing concern.

In August of 1958, shortly after the revolution, U.S. foreign policy had focused on preventing the expansion of the power of the Nasser and the UAR. Between August and December of 1958, the focus shifted dramatically. While the perceived danger from the nationalists had lessened to a great degree, the Communists had replaced them as the major ideologically motivated power group

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<sup>181</sup> *ibid*, 366-67.

<sup>182</sup> Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Rountree) to Acting Secretary of State Dillon, 22 December 1958, FRUS 1958-60, 368-70.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid*, 370.

in Iraq. The perception that the Iraqi Communist Party was the driving force in Iraqi internal politics would dominate U.S. foreign policy for the next year. For the State Department of John Foster Dulles, the worst of all possible alternatives seemed to be coming to pass.



## V

### THE IRAQI COMMUNIST PARTY PEAKS

#### AND FALLS

In January 1959, there was no doubt in the State Department that the largest threat to U.S. interests in Iraq lay in the ascendancy of the Communist Party. The Ba'athists and the pro-union faction, which had dominated the analysis immediately after 14 July, had virtually become a non-factor in Foggy Bottom. The situation had become so problematic that the State Department considered union with the UAR a hedge against Communist domination of Iraq. The State Department generally viewed Qasim as either a dupe who would serve the interests of the Iraqi Communist Party, or one who was reliant on them and would be unable to resist them once they made their bid for power. In Iraq, the possibility of violent action against him by the nationalists preoccupied Qasim. He certainly did not remain unaware of what threat the Communists might pose to him, though. He had already taken steps to limit their ability to directly force issues on the street. And over the next few months, he would reduce their political power. And this came shortly after that power reached its zenith.

### **A. The State Department's View of Communist Power**

In early January 1959, a series of despatches from the embassy in Baghdad established the framework for U.S. consideration of the situation in Iraq. The first of these, bluntly titled "Is Qassim a Communist?," was sent on 5 January. It basically presented what the embassy considered were the arguments for and against the proposition. Evidence that Qasim was in fact a Communist came down to a list of seven factors. They were the inability of civilian ministers to resist Communist influences despite their concerns, the fact that the economics minister was at the very least sympathetic to the Communists, that other key figures were sympathetic to the Communists, and that the Communists were infiltrating the senior and middle grades of many ministries. The activity of the Party and the Popular Resistance Force, in spite of an official ban on party activity, also added credence to the claims. Baba 'Ali, the Minister of Communications and Works, had gone so far as to claim Qasim was a Communist prior to the revolution. On the other side of the coin, the embassy cited the concern of the Army division commanders, his not approving executions of leaders of the old regime, and Iraq's failure to formally abandon the Baghdad Pact as evidence against the thesis. In summary, the embassy concluded that Qasim

was at the very least favorably disposed to the Iraqi Communist Party, and that the optimism of a few months back that he would steer a course between union with the UAR and Communism seemed unfounded.<sup>184</sup>

A second despatch chronicled the Iraqi Communist Party's rise to open power in the months after the coup, from July to December of 1958. It cited the Party's ability to publish and distribute information and organize the various unions and societies in the few months after the revolution as evidence of its "cohesiveness, dedication and organizational ability."<sup>185</sup> In examining the front organizations of the Party, they state that

Cursory checks of names associated with the establishment of a few of the new "unions" and with the Partisans of Peace reveal numerous individuals long known to be active in Communist organizations. Persons formerly imprisoned for a Communist activity...are the leading spirits of the headlong rush to organize. To be sure, Communists find a willing mass, ready to be led and relishing the new freedom to demonstrate...<sup>186</sup>

The report concludes that non-Communist Iraqis are unable to act, and that the Communists and leftists have the political field to themselves. The embassy doubted whether they even could act to prevent a Communist takeover of Iraq.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> 787.00/1-559, Despatch from the Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, Subject "Is Qassim a Communist," 5 January 1959, 1-3.

<sup>185</sup> 787.00/1-659, Despatch from the Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, Subject "Communists and the Revolution," 6 January 1959, 1.

<sup>186</sup> *ibid*, 2.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid*, 3.

A third despatch described the political atmosphere that the Qasim regime was promoting in Iraq. It concluded that Qasim, following the Rashid 'Ali plot, had launched a campaign to ensure that all Iraqis were aware of the presence of anti-regime plotters around them. The embassy noted that the expressions of the Iraqi press had taken a decidedly anti-Western, and especially anti-U.S. bent. The Baghdad press was described as "especially vehement,"<sup>188</sup> denouncing the West and America at every opportunity. The embassy described the anti-imperialist line of Iraq as "its shrill voice crying 'wolf' where no wolf exists"<sup>189</sup> which could not "simply be part of its present Communist orientation."<sup>190</sup> The final conclusion was that while this may not have been a direct result of Communist activity, it certainly "dovetails with Communist tactics and provides a protective coloration for Communists which almost defies identification."<sup>191</sup> The embassy had certainly given the impression that if Communists were not in direct control, they were certainly the primary influence on the Qasim regime at the time.

Two days after the transmission of the third despatch, Qasim did pull in the reins slightly on the Communists. While thanking the members of the Party for their efforts on behalf of the regime, he ordered members of the Popular

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<sup>188</sup> 787.00/1-1259, Despatch from the Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, Subject "Iraqi Government Encourages an Atmosphere of Intrigue," 12 January 1959, 1.

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

Resistance Force and the Student Union to refrain from performing any police duties without specific authorization from the government. This reigning in was to be short-lived, however. On 5 February, the regime announced a death sentence against 'Arif, and two days later all of the remaining nationalist and conservative members of the cabinet, including Siddiq Shanshal of the *Istiqlal* party, resigned.<sup>192</sup> The result was that the new cabinet was farther to the left than its predecessor had been, with more members who could be considered friendly to Qasim. The National Democratic Party and their supporters had gained the open seats, with no Communist Party members appointed to the cabinet. It was considered a gain for the Communists, however. Ittihad al-Shab, the Communist Party newspaper, expressed satisfaction with the results<sup>193</sup> and further reinforced this impression.

Shortly after the Cabinet reshuffle, the Director of the Office of Near East Affairs addressed a memo to William Rountree analyzing the implications of the resignations. The assessment was that the six ministers had hoped to force Qasim's hand, making him take an anti-Communist stand. They summarized the reshuffle as a setback for anti-Communist forces in Iraq, as well as for Nasser and the UAR. Needless to say, the conclusion was that the Communists had made

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<sup>192</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 858-59.

<sup>193</sup> Dann, *Iraq Under Qassem*, 152-53.

further gains in Iraq. The prospects for anti-Communists in Iraq appeared bleak, as the factions that opposed them were out of power, and the National Democratic Party, which made gains after the resignations, was the only remaining restraint on the influence of the Communists over the regime. While Qasim was not identified as a Communist as such, his top advisors were.<sup>194</sup> In a briefing to the National Security Council on 12 February, Allen Dulles stated that "In the intelligence community, however, we do think that the trend represented by these cabinet changes was slightly in the Communist direction."<sup>195</sup>

A Special National Intelligence Estimate was published on 17 February, dealing specifically with the Communist threat in Iraq. The overall evaluation was that the Communists were making a drive for power in Baghdad. It stated that Nasser appeared to be seeking a counterrevolutionary move in Iraq, but that the Soviets were not so heavily invested that they would intervene against a nationalist uprising against the Qasim regime. While not finding conclusive evidence that Qasim himself was a Communist, they did assess him to be either unwilling or unable to take action against the Iraqi Communist Party, or their Soviet backers. It assessed Qasim's motives as primarily in opposition to pro-

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<sup>194</sup> Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs (Rockwell) to the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Rountree), 9 February 1959, FRUS 1958-60, 378-380.

<sup>195</sup> FRUS 1958-60, 381.

UAR or pro-U.S. initiatives in Iraq, as opposed to being pro-Soviet. The net effect of his conduct, however, was to allow the Communists to become the most effective political faction in Iraq. The public was seen as split, and the Army was considered to be the most likely source of resistance to a Communist takeover of Iraq. Its view of future prospects was dim as well. It saw the Communists moving towards a gradual assumption of power, as opposed to an overt takeover. While they felt that Qasim might come to view the Communists as a threat, they saw it as more likely that he would continue to view the UAR and the West as greater threats to his power. It also discussed the implications of either a Communist or a nationalist takeover in Iraq at length. The possibility of a Communist-controlled Iraq was seen as more dangerous to Western interests than an Iraq aligned with the UAR.<sup>196</sup>

The State Department issued operational guidance concerning Iraq the next day. The primary objectives of U.S. foreign policy in Iraq were set out in simple terms. Denial of the area to the Soviets and ensuring the continuing flow of oil from the Middle East were the primary policy objectives for the area as a whole, with secondary objectives encompassing other political and national security issues. Their view was that the future for Iraq was uncertain, with violent

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<sup>196</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate 36.2-59, "The Communist Threat to Iraq," 17 February 1959, FRUS 1958-60, 381-385.

or non-violent change likely. Against that backdrop, they set policy objectives for dealing with Iraq. The United States sought to be friendly but not forcing themselves upon the Iraqi government. Dispelling suspicions against the U.S. government, as well as counseling our allies in Turkey and Iran against provocative measures, were important as well. They sought to encourage normal relations with the Qasim regime, with the proviso that "...should use every appropriate opportunity to warn selected Iraqi leaders about the Communist threat."<sup>197</sup>

#### **B. The Mosul Uprising Leads to the Communist's Zenith**

While the Communists had been making gains in January and February of 1959, it was the events of early March in Mosul that provided the single greatest impetus in their rising power. Nationalist Army officers in the city provided the nucleus of a movement to overthrow the Qasim regime.<sup>198</sup> Some of them had been in contact with Rashid 'Ali prior to his abortive coup against Qasim, among them Rif'at al-Hajj Sirri, the founder of the Free Officer movement.<sup>199</sup> The nationalist and conservative parties in Mosul were also aware of the plot and

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<sup>197</sup> Paper Prepared by the Operations Coordinating Board, "Operational Guidance Concerning Iraq," 18 February 1959. FRUS 1958-60, 389-92.

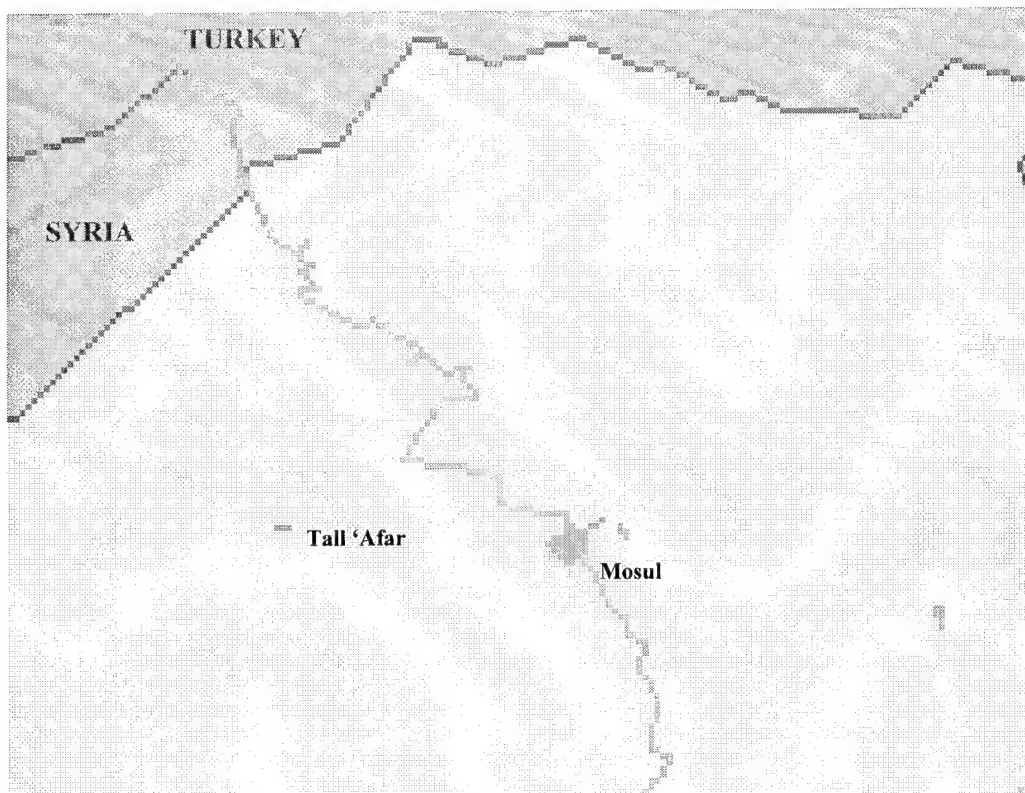
<sup>198</sup> Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 871.

<sup>199</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, Iraq Since 1958, 61-62.



### MAP III

#### MOSUL AND THE SURROUNDING AREA



sided with the Army faction.<sup>200</sup> But the man who was to become leader was not strictly a nationalist. Col. 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Shawwaf, whose name was to become associated with this revolt, had been reassigned to Mosul shortly after the coup by Qasim, and viewed it as exile. If he were to take a stand against Qasim he would have to side with the plot.<sup>201</sup> Nasser and the UAR also had a hand in events, with the UAR providing unstinting support to the plot. The Communists, however, took note of events and on 23 February informed Qasim that a revolt might be brewing in Mosul.<sup>202</sup>

The Communists decided to hold a Partisans of Peace Rally in Mosul on 6 March, with Qasim's support. The government made it easy for participants to travel by taking steps to reduce costs, including scheduling a special train for them.<sup>203</sup> The rally went off as scheduled without violence, and by nightfall most of the participants had left Mosul. The next day, however, violence flared through Mosul between Communist and anti-Communist groups,<sup>204</sup> and Col. al-Shawwaf declared his revolt against Qasim at 7:00 on the morning of 7 March. While the rebels moved, they did not enjoy great success. In fact, they were successful only in Mosul.<sup>205</sup> Most of the fighting was along class and ethnic lines,

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<sup>200</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 872.

<sup>201</sup> Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*, 106.

<sup>202</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 873.

<sup>203</sup> *ibid*, 879.

<sup>204</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 67.

<sup>205</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 881-83.

as opposed to ideological ones. The fighting continued, however, as the Communists and their supporters counterattacked and regained control of the city of Mosul. Col. al-Shawwaf was killed in the fighting.<sup>206</sup>

After having come to its defense, the Iraqi Communist Party began making demands of the Qasim regime. They pressed harder for recognition of their role in the revolt and for representation in the government of Iraq.<sup>207</sup> In Baghdad, the opposition all but disappeared from the streets after 9 March.<sup>208</sup> Qasim needed little urging to purge the government of those who were sympathetic to a plot supported by the UAR, and it appeared that the Communists were actively pushing for power in the regime.

In the wake of the revolt, the prospects appeared dim for U.S. hopes that Iraq would not fall under the sway of the Communists. The Party's role in crushing the Mosul uprising gave it more power, and also gave it the tools it needed to push for formal representation in the regime. A telegram from the embassy in Baghdad to the State Department seemingly confirmed the worst. The only question that remained was "...whether Qasim and GOI are too far along road to communism to turn back and whether Iraq consequently is fated to be first

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<sup>206</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 68.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid*, 68-69.

<sup>208</sup> Dann, *Iraq Under Qassem*, 179.

Soviet satellite in Arab world.”<sup>209</sup> The embassy assigned noticeable gains to the Communists and their allies since the revolt, including a near-total domination of the press in Iraq. The Party was seen to dominate the unions and associations, academia, and most of the ministries. On the other side, they noted that the Communists were attempting to maintain discipline among their supporters. Additionally, the Qasim regime had not granted many of the demands of the Party and their front organizations, and had not formally appointed any members of the Communist Party into the government.<sup>210</sup> However, the embassy’s assessment was that

...seems to us there is grave danger that in short run Iraq will come under preponderantly Communist control. Our past estimates have always centered around question whether Qassim is himself a Communist or otherwise a voluntary follower of Communist direction...we still cannot answer that question categorically. Recent events, however, have steadily increased our doubts as to whether Qassim can, even if he wished to, reverse this trend.<sup>211</sup>

While the question of Qasim’s loyalties and philosophy was still open, it appeared to have even less relevance.

On 15 April, the State Department prepared further guidance for the situation. In a policy paper of that date, they made several recommendations to

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<sup>209</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 26 March 1959, FRUS 1958-60, 395.

<sup>210</sup> *ibid*, 395-98.

<sup>211</sup> *ibid*, 398.

prevent Iraq from falling to the Communists. At the outset, they set forward the case for the Communist's strength--control of the media, the activity of the Popular Resistance Force, the control of the unions, and the ongoing takeover of the government ministries. They assessed anti-Communists forces as being demoralized and powerless to prevent these trends. Additionally, the embassy saw Soviet support for the regime as evident in the tone and content of press statements, and in economic and military assistance. However, it noted that U.S. allies in the Middle East--Iran, Turkey, Jordan, and Israel--were not as alarmed as the U.S. and believed that Qasim would maintain Iraq's independence. In terms of what policy actions could be taken to prevent Communist control, it listed a variety of options. First among these was convincing Qasim that the U.S. was friendly to Iraq and desired to see Iraq maintain its independence. Included with this was providing Qasim with alternative sources of support. The State Department evaluated military intervention as a counterproductive option, and other options were considered to be less than effective as well. The conclusion was that U.S. options to take action in Iraq to prevent a Communist takeover were limited at best.<sup>212</sup> Recommended measures included discreetly assisting Nasser's anti-Communist and anti-Iraq campaign, encouraging "détente between Iraq and

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<sup>212</sup> Paper Prepared in the Department of State, "The Situation in Iraq: Policy the United States Should Follow to Prevent Communism From Establishing Control of the Country," 15 April 1959, FRUS 1958-60, 414-19.

the UAR,<sup>213</sup> maintaining a friendly attitude with the Qasim regime and closely cooperating with the British.<sup>214</sup>

The intelligence community prepared two follow-ups to the Special National Intelligence Estimate on the situation in Iraq in late April. The first of these dealt with the actual situation in Iraq, acknowledging the gains made by the Communists following the Mosul revolt--labeling that as the chief aftereffect of the revolt. The estimate reiterated the themes of Communist control of a variety of ministries and of all sources of public information in Iraq, as well as their control of the streets. However, the estimate also stated that popular loyalties were riding with Qasim as opposed to the Communists.<sup>215</sup> The other estimate dealt with other countries' probable reaction to a Communist takeover of Iraq. Increasing support, or at least countenance, for Nasser's campaign against Qasim was expected from all but Jordan and Israel. It viewed the UAR as the only Arab state with any effective influence over Iraq, with Turkey and Iran having limited ability to affect the situation short of armed intervention. The assessment that the Soviets did not want to openly seize power in Iraq was reiterated as well. But the closer the Iraqi Communist Party came to seizing power, the greater the risks the

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<sup>213</sup> *ibid*, 421.

<sup>214</sup> *ibid*, 421-22.

<sup>215</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate 36.2/1-59, "The Communist Threat to Iraq," 21 April 1959, FRUS 1958-60, 439-40.

Soviets would be willing to take.<sup>216</sup> In short, the State Department saw little chance of preventing a Communist takeover of Iraq at the end of April.

### **C. The Communists Peak and Begin to Fall**

The days after the Mosul revolt had boosted the Communists to the zenith of their influence and power in Iraq. They had been gaining support in the Army, and many senior officers were either Party members or sympathetic to their cause.<sup>217</sup> On 28 April, the Party formally requested representation in the Qasim regime. Qasim rebuked them two days later, not only denouncing partisan interests but questioning the necessity of the Party in a future Iraqi government. Then on 1 May, the Communists sponsored a protest in the streets of Baghdad calling for representation in the government. While the number of people who actually turned out was a source of dispute, the number was at least 300,000.<sup>218</sup> At this point Qasim considered the Party to be a threat to his authority, and reacted accordingly. A blanket ban on all party activity was the first step.<sup>219</sup> And the refusal of another request to arm the Popular Resistance Force, effectively keeping it under the control of the regime, was another. Interestingly, the latter

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<sup>216</sup>Special National Intelligence Estimate 36.2-2-59, "Probable Reactions to the Communist Threat in Iraq," 28 April 1959, FRUS 1958-60, 442-43.

<sup>217</sup>Batatu, The Old Social Classes, 891-95.

<sup>218</sup>*ibid*, 899-900.

<sup>219</sup>Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, Iraq Since 1958, 69.

move was not viewed as part of a crackdown on the Communist Party, as few had noticed that the Force was dependent on the regime.<sup>220</sup>

At this point the Communist Party had to decide whether to confront the regime openly or back down and accommodate Qasim. In internal discussions in late May, the Party decided to back down and not force a confrontation. Factors that may have contributed to this decision included the fact that they might not have enough support within the Army, the supporters who had joined the bandwagon following the revolution might desert them in a contest with Qasim, and the new members had not been properly screened, among others. But the single greatest factor may have been that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union put pressure on their Iraqi comrades, in order to preserve their links to Nasser and avoid provoking the West and the United States.<sup>221</sup> The Soviet Union was a staunch supporter of the Qasim regime. Krushchev considered Iraq to be more advanced than the UAR, a preference and position that annoyed the UAR leadership. Like the Iraqi Communist Party, the Soviets opposed union with the UAR. They also applauded Qasim's agrarian reforms, and noted that a distinctive feature of Iraq was the unusually high level of political activity on the part of the

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<sup>220</sup> Dann, *Iraq Under Qassem*, 184.

<sup>221</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 901-903.



public.<sup>222</sup> It is ironic that the major factor in persuading the Iraqi Communist Party to withdraw was the Soviet Union, as the potential of a Soviet-satellite Iraq concerned the United States more than any other possibility.

In June, it was becoming evident to the State Department that not only was Qasim not a Communist, but also that they had seriously underestimated his ability to deal with the Iraqi Communist Party. One of the first indications of this was in a telegram from the Embassy to the Secretary of State dated 1 June. It addressed steps that Qasim had taken in the four weeks prior to its transmission to curb the rise of Communist power in Iraq. The embassy stated that he was most likely not a Communist, and that his statements of the time denounced partisan political activity. Also noted was apparent out-maneuvering of the Communists by the National Democratic Party, which they had previously considered as either sympathetic to, or unable to stand up to, the Communist line. Other statements indicated a new-found optimism on the part of the anti-Communist factions, and that they were confident that the Communists would not seize power in Iraq.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Aryeh Yodfat, *Arab Politics in the Soviet Mirror* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1973), 149-51.

<sup>223</sup> 787.00/6-159, Telegram from the Embassy in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, 1 June 1959, 1-3.

Another follow-up to the Special National Intelligence Estimate further bolstered the conclusion that the Communist tide was ebbing. The opening paragraph bluntly stated that

...we now felt that recent SNIE's have been too gloomy. There are signs of growing resolve on Qassim's part to move with increasing determination against the Iraqi Communists. We now think that Communist control of Iraq is somewhat less likely than we thought it was a few weeks ago.<sup>224</sup>

While conceding that the Communists were no longer advancing, they did note that the threat posed by the Party was far from diminished at the time. The Communists had maintained their positions in government, and still had power over "mass organizations and street mobs." The events of the next two weeks would bear watching, as the approaching anniversary of the revolution provided a time for political maneuvering.<sup>225</sup> But while the U.S. worried about the Communists, events that they had very little part in and influence over would dictate the Communist's fate in these two weeks.

#### **D. The Kirkuk Uprising Dooms the Communists**

The prediction proved to be very accurate. The events in Kirkuk on 14 July sealed the fate of the Communist Party in Iraq, and brought Qasim to

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<sup>224</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate 36.2/2-59, "Short-term Outlook in Iraq," 30 June 1959, FRUS 1958-60, 471.

<sup>225</sup> *ibid*, 471.

unchallenged power for the moment. While he could not dispense with the Communists, he certainly had wanted to rein them in,<sup>226</sup> and had done so in May and June of 1959. The events in Kirkuk gave him the opportunity to cement his ascendancy over the Communists. While nothing was to prove more harmful to the Party than the events in this northern oil town, it is noteworthy that the Communists had little to do with events there in a formal sense. The fighting in Kirkuk was primarily ethnic, and many Communist Kurds had taken part, but as Kurds rather than Communists.<sup>227</sup> This ethnic fighting, however, was centered on a celebration of the anniversary of the Revolution in the city. The number of ethnic Turks and anti-Communists killed, however, far exceeded the number of Kurdish or Communist dead.<sup>228</sup>

As such, the Qasim regime seized the opportunity to use the events in Kirkuk to tarnish the Communists. The regime arrested members of the Party, and placed further restrictions on the operations of front organizations and the Popular Resistance Force. The anti-Communist press in Baghdad eagerly publicized the "massacre," using it as proof of Communist-ordered atrocities.<sup>229</sup> Qasim himself expressed his dismay, noting that even the Zionists "...did not

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<sup>226</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 911.

<sup>227</sup> *ibid*, 912-13.

<sup>228</sup> Dann, *Iraq Under Qassem*, 223.

<sup>229</sup> Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 71.

commit such atrocities."<sup>230</sup> While the Party had not ordered or even desired the slaughter of Turcomans in Kirkuk, it had become tainted by the event.

The events in Kirkuk had given Qasim the wedge he had needed against the Iraqi Communist Party, and they also gave the U.S. breathing space in dealing with Iraq. While briefing the National Security Council, Allen Dulles reported that

...the Kirkuk outbreak had been put down more rapidly than our own...press had indicated. Still, however, no one knows much about why the outbreak began or how it began. On the other hand, further outbreaks could occur at any time. Qasim has condemned all elements involved in these outbreaks and has especially singled out the Communists.<sup>231</sup>

For the U.S. policymakers worried about a Soviet foothold in the Middle East, the news could hardly be better.

The embassy was reporting more information on the Iraqi Communist Party on 9 August. In a telegram to Washington, they offered an update to their 1 June assessment. They saw that the regime had turned the corner on the Communists, and that their power was waning. Anti-Communist measures reported included the nullification of the Popular Resistance Force as an effective body, dismissal of pro-Communist Army officers, the denunciation of student union participation in terrorist and propaganda acts, and the condemnation of the

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<sup>230</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 919.

<sup>231</sup> *FRUS 1958-1960*, 474.

Kirkuk massacres. But while viewing Qasim's actions taken to curb the Party's power as positive, they considered his statements on other fronts to be ambiguous. They take note of the fact that the word "Communist" had not been used in any of the denunciations. While noting that the Qasim regime had clipped the Party's wings, they had made gains over the last year and that the international Communist movement as a whole could not be wholly displeased with events.<sup>232</sup> In summary, they state that: "Our hopes for measurable progress toward relative stability and genuine independence are riding on shoulder of one man, whose judgment regarding key factor of Communism is still open to question."<sup>233</sup>

The end of the Communist Party's ascendancy in Iraq was spelled out by their actions in August of 1959. A summary of a report appeared in *Ittihad al-Shab* on 3 August, and the Party printed the full report on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. They unequivocally condemned the violence in Kirkuk as a matter of course. But additionally, they laid every aspect of the Party open to criticism. They had seized opportunities that were not fully realized and been blinded by the speed at which they had gained power. They had also denied the need to cooperate with other leftist forces in Iraq, and had been to bureaucratically organized. The report represented the final victory of the faction in the Party that had persevered in

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<sup>232</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, 9 August 1959, FRUS 1958-60, 474-477.

<sup>233</sup> *ibid*, 477.

May. Those who desired cooperation with Qasim and his acceptance as leader had triumphed over those who sought a harder line. This stand did not help them with respect to the other leftist political parties in Iraq, but it did find favor with Qasim, who relaxed the pressure he had been placing on the Party.<sup>234</sup>

The embassy provided another look at the events of July and August 1959 in a despatch to the State Department of 10 September, titled "Political Party Activity in Iraq--January through August 1959." The embassy examined all of the major parties and their activities over that stretch of time, with the majority of time spent on the Communist's activities. While the Party had suffered setbacks in July and August, the regime had not removed from the political scene.<sup>235</sup> They assessed the optimism of the anti-Communists as premature, while the Communists were realizing that their "position was not at all bad. A number of teachers and students who had been arrested were let free by the authorities, and the Communist press hailed the release as a vindication of student and teacher organizations."<sup>236</sup> And the press issue, while seemingly more balanced, still had Communist Party organs presenting their information. In summary, they saw that

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<sup>234</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 926-30.

<sup>235</sup> 787.00/9-1059, Despatch from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, subject "Political Party Activity in Iraq--January through August 1959," 10 September 1959, 11.

<sup>236</sup> *ibid*, 11.

"Qassim's performance during the period, especially in July; indicated that he will not hesitate to crack down on the CPI if necessary; but it also appears as if he does not believe that the Communist ideology poses a threat to Iraq."<sup>237</sup>

Of course, the State Department and other U.S. policymakers had reason to be pleased. The prospect of a communist state in the Middle East, so inimical to U.S. foreign policy objectives, had been averted without any overt show of force on the part of the United States. Yet there were still lingering suspicions of the gains that the Iraqi Communist Party had made, and of Qasim's motivations and true feelings regarding Communist power in Iraq. In September 1959, these suspicions were suspect at best, as the Iraqi Communist Party had largely abandoned an immediate drive for power on their own. But they were still the threat to U.S. policy in Iraq.

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<sup>237</sup> *ibid*, 11.

## CONCLUSIONS

The United States government, and the State Department in particular, created many of their own problems in dealing with revolutionary Iraq and the Qasim regime. Some of these were errors that prevented them from accurately assessing the internal situation, and others were caused by an overreliance on certain types and sources of information. But their inability to overcome their basic anti-Communist, anti-Soviet, pro-stability policy created most of the problems and concerns in dealing with post-revolutionary Iraq.

The primary focus of U.S. foreign policy of the time was opposition to the Soviet Union. This stance in opposition to Communism colored the actions and perceptions of American government agencies, and also provided a frame of reference for setting priorities and policy. How it affected U.S. policy and actions in Iraq can easily be seen. The overpowering American interest was to prevent Iraq from becoming the first satellite of the Soviet Union in the Arab Middle East. This fear that the Communists might gain a foothold so close to the Arabian peninsula colored other considerations involving Iraq. As a result, any gains made by the Iraqi Communist Party were magnified, and opposition to them was viewed as either half-hearted or ineffective. The fact that the Communists were



able to dominate the news media, trade unions, professional associations and student groups in Iraq translated into Qasim either being a willing sympathizer to the Party, or a dupe that was being used as a front for the Party. That Qasim himself had a fairly firm grip on the reins, and supported the Communist Party as a means of securing his own power in Iraq, did not immediately occur to the State Department or other agencies. This willingness to use the Communists for his own ends did not become apparent until shortly before the events in Kirkuk in July of 1959. And even after the crackdown on the Communists following the Kirkuk violence, the United States still saw them as a potential threat to United States interests.

The second objective of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, that of maintaining stability throughout the region, provided a second frame of reference that U.S. analysts and policymakers appeared unable to break. The initial surge toward immediate union with the UAR, and the apparent energy of the 'Arif faction when compared with Qasim and the government, contributed to the initial problems the United States had in assessing the nature of the coup. While they were able to see that the coup had been largely generated by internal factions, they were unable to see the inherently Iraqi nature of the new regime until shortly before the Rashid 'Ali plot was foiled. The initial impression was that the coup, if

not inspired and supported directly by Nasser, was at least part of the general Arab nationalist movement under his aegis. The initial successes that 'Abd al-Salaam 'Arif and the Ba'thists achieved in the days following the revolution solidified the impression that Iraq would soon be a full partner of Egypt and Syria in the United Arab Republic. Once again, Qasim was largely seen to be a non-factor in this drive toward immediate union with the UAR, and his own personal views and motives were not adequately examined. This in spite of the fact that he publicly had been lukewarm on the issue of union.

Procedural errors existed as well. The embassy, and the agencies in Washington, were too reliant on sources of information that provided a false picture of events in Iraq and Baghdad. Attitudes of the crowds in the street continually colored embassy reporting of events in Baghdad. This started with the assessment of the coup as basically Nasserite, the supporting evidence being the mobs in the streets with pro-UAR placards and pictures of Nasser. It continued with the emphasis given to the crowds listening to 'Arif's speechmaking and the large groups that the Communists were able to mobilize in the streets of a variety of Iraqi cities. While these were important factors when determining the internal situation, they were overvalued as a barometer of actual political power. Overreliance on newspaper reports and radio broadcasts colored

the assessment of events in Iraq as well, usually overestimating the power of either the nationalists or the Communists. By the same token, they undervalued the role of the Qasim regime.

Complimenting all of it were simple errors. The embassy and Washington overlooked or ignored pieces of information that could have clarified matters, or prompted questions that would have given them a greater understanding of the power structure in Baghdad. An example of this can be seen in Qasim's refusing to arm the Popular Resistance Force units. By maintaining control of their weapons, Qasim denied the Communists an armed force that was answerable to the Party as opposed to the regime. He also ensured the superiority of the security apparatus that was loyal to him by doing so. But this information, though available, was not reported.

A lack of expertise among the senior people at the State Department contributed to difficulties as well. While all of the senior officials directly concerned with the problem were long-time veterans of the State Department, they lacked experience in dealing with the Arab world. Those members who had Middle Eastern experience had worked with either Turkey or Iran in the past, rather than Arab nations. This would generate difficulties as well. None of the senior officials were especially familiar with certain unique Arab political

movements, like the Ba'th Party. And the Arabization of the Iraqi Communist Party in the years immediately preceding the coup injected an element in that faction that men like Waldemar Gallman were not prepared to deal with.

In summary, a combination of factors contributed to American assessments in Iraq. Procedural errors and missed information certainly contributed to the inaccurate assessments of first Arab nationalist, and then Communist, power in Baghdad. They also compounded problems caused by officials not intimately familiar with Iraqi politics. But it was the inability to break through the framework imposed on them by the policy of the time that led to the greatest difficulties. They were not able to adjust to the new paradigm, and stuck to their own frame of reference. As a result, events in Iraq proceeded, but the U.S. interpretation of these events was influenced more by concerns external to Iraq as opposed to the events and personalities in Baghdad.

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